H.P.T. N° 13/9.

THE ANALOGY OF RELIGION,

NATURAL AND REVEALED

TO THE

CONSTITUTION AND COURSE OF NATURE.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

TWO BRIEF DISSERTATIONS:

I. OF PERSONAL IDENTITY.
II. OF THE NATURE OF VIRTUE.

BY

JOSEPH BUTLER, LL.D. LATE LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM.

Ejus (Analogiae) *haec vis eſt, ut id quod dubium eſt, ad aliquid ſimile de quo non quaeritur, referat; ut incerta certis probet.*

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TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

CHARLES Lord TALBOT.

Baron of HENSOL,

Lord High Chancellor of GREAT BRITAIN,

The following TREATISE is with all Reſpect, Inſcribed, in Acknowledgment of the Higheſt Obligations to the late Lord Biſhop of DURHAM and to HIMSELF.

By His LORDSHIP'S

moſt dutiful,

moſt devoted,

and moſt humble Servant,

JOSEPH BUTLER.

ADVERTISEMENT.

IF the Reader ſhould meet here with any thing, which he had not before attended to, it will not be in the obſervations upon the Conſtitution and Courſe of Nature, theſe being all obvious; but in the application of them: In which, though there is nothing but what appears to me of ſome real weight, and therefore of great importance; yet he will obſerve ſeveral things, which will appear to him of very little, if he can think things to be of little importance, which are of any real weight at all, upon ſuch a ſubject as Religion.

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However the proper force of the following treatiſe, lies in the whole general Analogy conſidered together.

It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted, by many perſons, that Chriſtianity is not ſo much as a ſubject of inquiry; but that it is, now at length, diſcovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it, as if, in the preſent age, this were an agreed point, among all people of diſcernment; and nothing remained, but to ſet it up as a principal ſubject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of repriſals, for its having ſo long interrupted the pleaſures of the world. On the contrary, thus much, at leaſt, will be here found, not taken for granted, but proved, that any reaſonable man, who will thoroughly conſider the matter, may be as much aſſured, as he is of his own Being, that it is not, however, ſo clear a caſe, that there is nothing in it. There is, I think, ſtrong evi-

dence of its truth; but it is certain no one can, upon principles of reaſon, be ſatisfied of the contrary. And the practical conſequence to be drawn from this, is not attended to, by every one who is concerned in it.

May, 1736.

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INTRODUCTION.

PRobable evidence is eſſentially diſtinguiſhed from demonſtrative by this, that it admits of degrees; and of all variety of them, from the higheſt moral certainty, to the very loweſt preſumption. We cannot indeed ſay a thing is probably true upon one very ſlight preſumption for it; becauſe, as there may be probabilities on both ſides of a queſtion, there may be ſome againſt it: and though there be not, yet a ſlight preſumption does not beget that degree of conviction, which is implied in ſaying a thing is probably true. But that the ſlighteſt poſſible preſumption is of the nature of a probability, appears from hence; that ſuch low preſumption often repeated, will amount even to moral certainty. Thus a man's having obſerved the ebb and flow of the tide to day, affords ſome ſort of preſumption, though the loweſt imaginable, that it may happen again to-morrow: But the obſervation of this event for ſo many days, and months, and ages together, as it hath been obſerved by mankind, gives us a full aſſurance that it will.

THAT which chiefly conſtitutes probability is expreſſed in the word likely, *i. e.* like ſome truth *, or true event; like it, in itſelf, in its evidence, in

* Veriſimile.

ſome more or fewer of its circumſtances. For when we determine a thing to be probably true, ſuppoſe that an event has or will come to paſs, 'tis from the mind's remarking in it a likeneſs to ſome other event, which we have obſerved has come to paſs. And this obſervation forms, in numberleſs daily inſtances, a preſumption, opinion, or full conviction, that ſuch event has or will come to paſs; according as the obſervation is, that the like event has ſometimes, moſt commonly, or always ſo far as our obſervation reaches, come to paſs at like diſtances of time, or place, or upon like occaſions. Hence ariſes the belief, that a child, if it lives twenty years, will grow up to the ſtature and ſtrength of a man; that food will contribute to the preſervation of its life, and the want of it for ſuch a number of days, be its certain deſtruction. So likewiſe the rule and meaſure of our hopes and fears concerning the ſucceſs of our purſuits; our expectations that others will act ſo and ſo in ſuch circumſtances; and our judgment that ſuch actions proceed from ſuch principles; all theſe rely upon our having obſerved the like to what we hope, fear, expect, judge; I ſay upon our having obſerved the like, either with reſpect to others, or ourſelves. And thus, whereas the Prince† who had always lived in a warm climate, naturally concluded in a way of analogy, that there was no ſuch thing as water's becoming hard; becauſe he had always obſerved it to be fluid and yielding: We on the contrary, from analogy conclude, that there is no preſumption at all againſt this: that 'tis ſuppoſe-

† The ſtory is told by Mr. Locke in the chapter of probability.

able, there may be froſt in *England*, any given day in *January* next; probable that there will on ſome day of the month; and that there is a moral certainty, *i. e.* ground for an expectation without any doubt of it, in ſome part or other of the winter.

3

Probable evidence, in its very nature, affords but an imperfect kind of information; and is to be conſidered as relative only to beings of limited capacities. For nothing which is the poſſible object of knowledge, whether paſt, preſent, or future, can be probable to an infinite intelligence; ſince it cannot but be diſcerned abſolutely as it is in itſelf, certainly true, or certainly falſe. But to us, probability is the very guide of life.

4

From theſe things it follows, that in queſtions of difficulty, or ſuch as are thought ſo, where more ſatisfactory evidence cannot be had, or is not ſeen; if the reſult of examination be, that there appears upon the whole, any the loweſt preſumption on one ſide, and none on the other, or a greater preſumption on one ſide, though in the loweſt degree greater; this determines the queſtion, even in matters of ſpeculation; and in matters of practice, will lay us under an abſolute and formal obligation, in point of prudence and of intereſt, to act upon that preſumption, or low probability, though it be ſo low as to leave the mind in very great doubt which is the truth. For ſurely a man is as really bound in pru-

dence, to do what upon the whole appears, according to the beſt of his judgment, to be for his happineſs, as what he certainly knows to be ſo. Nay further, in queſtions of great conſequence, a reaſonable man would think it concerns him to remark lower probabilities and preſumptions than theſe; ſuch as amount to no more than ſhowing one ſide of a queſtion to be as ſuppoſeable and credible as the other: nay ſuch as but amount to much leſs even than this. For numberleſs inſtances might be mentioned reſpecting the common purſuits of life, where a man would be thought, in a literal ſenſe, diſtracted, who would not act, and with great application too, not only upon an even chance, but upon much leſs, and where the probability or chance was greatly againſt his ſucceeding.‡

It is not my deſign to enquire further into the nature, the foundation, and meaſure of probability; or whence it proceeds that *likeneſs* ſhould beget that preſumption, opinion, and full conviction, which the human mind is formed to receive from it, and which it does neceſſarily produce in every one; or to guard againſt the errors, to which reaſoning from analogy is liable. This belongs to the ſubject of Logic; and is a part of that ſubject which has not yet been throughly conſidered. Indeed I ſhall not take upon me to ſay, how far the extent, compaſs, and force of analogical reaſoning, can be reduced to general heads and rules; and the whole be formed into a ſyſtem. But though ſo little in this way has

‡ See chap. VI. Part II.

been attempted by those who have treated of our intellectual powers, and the exercise of them; this does not hinder but that we may be, as we unquestionably are, assured, that analogy is of weight, in various degrees, towards determining our judgment and our practice. Nor does it in any wise cease to be of weight in those cases, because persons, either given to dispute, or who require things to be stated with greater exactness than our faculties appear to admit of in practical matters, may find other cases in which 'tis not easy to say, whether it be, or be not, of any weight; or instances of seeming analogies, which are really of none. It is enough to the present purpose to observe, that this general way of arguing is evidently natural, just and conclusive. For there is no man can make a question but that the Sun will rise to-morrow; and be seen, where it is seen at all, in the figure of a circle, and not in that of a square.

Hence, namely from analogical reasoning, Origen * hath with singular sagacity observed, that "he who "believes the scripture to have proceeded from him "who is the Author of Nature, may well expect to "find the same sort of difficulties in it, as are found "in the constitution of nature." And in a like way of reflection it may be added, that he who denies the scripture to have been from God, upon

* Χρη μεν τοι γε τον απαξ παραδεξαμενον του κτισαντος τον κοσμον ειναι ταυτας τας γραφας πεπεισθαι, οτι οσα περι της κτισεως απαντας τοις ζητουσι τον περι αυτης λογον, ταυτα και περι των γραφων. Philocal. p. 23. Ed. Cant.

account of these difficulties, may, for the very same reason, deny the world to have been formed by him. On the other hand, if there be an analogy or likeness between that system of things and dispensation of providence, which revelation informs us of, and that system of things and dispensation of providence, which experience together with reason informs us of, *i. e.* the known course of nature; this is a presumption, that they have both the same author and cause; at least so far as to answer objections against the former's being from God, drawn from any thing which is analogical or similar to what is in the latter, which is acknowledged to be from him: for an Author of Nature is here supposed.

7. Forming our notions of the constitution and government of the world upon reasoning, without foundation for the principles which we assume, whether from the attributes of God or any thing else; is building a world upon hypothesis, like *Des Cartes*. Forming our notions upon reasoning from principles which are certain, but applied to cases to which we have no ground to apply them, (like those who explain the structure of the human body, and the nature of diseases, and medicines from mere mathematicks without sufficient *Data*:) is an error much a-kin to the former: since what is assumed in order to make the reasoning applicable, is hypothesis. But it must be allowed just, to join abstract reasonings with the observation of facts, and argue from such facts as are known, to others that are like them; from that part of the divine government over intelligent creatures which comes under our

view, to that larger and more general government over them, which is beyond it; and from what is preſent, to collect, what is likely, credible, or not incredible, will be hereafter.

This method then of concluding and determining being practical, and what, if we will act at all, we cannot but act upon in the common purſuits of life; being evidently concluſive, in various degrees, proportionable to the degree and exactneſs of the whole analogy or likeneſs; and having ſo great authority for its introduction into the ſubject of religion, even revealed religion; my deſign is to apply it to that ſubject in general, both natural and revealed: taking for proved, that there is an intelligent author of nature, and natural governor of the world. For as there is no preſumption againſt this prior to the proof of it: ſo it has been often proved with accumulated evidence; from this argument of analogy and final cauſes; from abſtract reaſonings; from the moſt antient tradition and teſtimony; and from the general conſent of mankind. Nor does it appear, ſo far as I can find, to be denied, by the generality of thoſe who profeſs themſelves diſſatisfied with the evidence of religion.

As there are ſome, who, inſtead of thus attending to what is in fact the conſtitution of nature, form their notions of God's government upon hypotheſis: ſo there are others, who indulge themſelves in vain and idle ſpeculations, how the world might poſſibly have been framed otherwiſe than it is; and upon ſuppoſition that things might, in ima-

gining that they ſhould, have been diſpoſed and carried on after a better model, than what appears in the preſent diſpoſition and conduct of them. Suppoſe now a perſon of ſuch a turn of mind, to go on with his reveries, till he had at length fixt upon ſome particular plan of nature, as appearing to him the beſt.———One ſhall ſcarce be thought guilty of detraction againſt human underſtanding, if one ſhould ſay, even before-hand, that the plan which this ſpeculative perſon would fix upon, though he were the wiſeſt of the ſons of men, probably would not be the very beſt, even according to his own notions of *beſt*; whether he thought that to be ſo, which afforded occaſions and motives for the exerciſe of the greateſt virtue, or which was productive of the greateſt happineſs, or that theſe two were neceſſarily connected, and run up into one and the ſame plan. However, it may not be amiſs once for all to ſee, what would be the amount of theſe emendations and imaginary improvements upon the ſyſtem of nature, or how far they would miſlead us. And it ſeems there could be no ſtopping, till we came to ſome ſuch concluſions as theſe: That all creatures ſhould at firſt be made as perfect and as happy, as they were capable of ever being: That nothing, to be ſure, of hazard or danger ſhould be put upon them to do; ſome indolent perſons would perhaps think nothing at all: Or certainly, that effectual care ſhould be taken, that they ſhould, whether neceſſarily or not, yet eventually and in fact, always do what was right and moſt conducive to happineſs, which would be thought eaſy for infinite power to effect; either by not giving them any

principles which would endanger their going wrong; or by laying the right motive of action in every inſtance before their minds continually in ſo ſtrong a manner, as would never fail of inducing them to act conformably to it: And that the whole method of government by puniſhments ſhould be rejected, as abſurd; as an awkward round-about method of carrying things on; nay as contrary to a principal purpoſe, for which it would be ſuppoſed creatures were made, namely happineſs.

Now, without conſidering what is to be ſaid in particular to the ſeveral parts of this train of folly and extravagance; what has been above intimated, is a full direct general anſwer to it, namely, that we may ſee before-hand that we have not faculties for this kind of ſpeculation. For though it be admitted, that from the firſt principles of our nature, we unavoidably judge or determine ſome ends to be abſolutely in themſelves preferable to others, and that the ends now mentioned, or if they run up into one, that this one is abſolutely the beſt; and conſequently that we muſt conclude the ultimate end deſigned, in the conſtitution of nature and conduct of providence, is the moſt virtue and happineſs poſſible: Yet we are far from being able to judge, what particular diſpoſition of things would be moſt friendly and aſſiſtant to virtue; or what means might be abſolutely neceſſary to produce the moſt happineſs in a ſyſtem of ſuch extent as our own world may be, taking in all that is paſt and to come, though we ſhould ſuppoſe it detached from the whole of things. Indeed we are ſo far from

being able to judge of this; that we are not judges what may be the neceſſary means of raiſing and conducting one perſon to the higheſt perfection and happineſs of his nature. Nay even in the little affairs of the preſent life, we find men of different educations and ranks are not competent judges of the conduct of each other. Our whole nature leads us to aſcribe all moral perfection to God, and to deny all imperfection of him. And this will for ever be a practical proof of his moral character, to ſuch as will conſider what a practical proof is; becauſe it is the voice of God ſpeaking in us. And from hence we conclude, that virtue muſt be the happineſs, and vice the miſery, of every creature; and that regularity and order and right cannot but prevail finally in a univerſe under his government. But we are in no ſort judges, what are the neceſſary means of accompliſhing this end.

// Let us then, inſtead of that idle and not very innocent employment of forming imaginary models of a world, and ſchemes of governing it, turn our thoughts to what we experience to be the conduct of nature with reſpect to intelligent creatures: which may be reſolved into general laws or rules of adminiſtration, in the ſame way as many of the laws of nature reſpecting inanimate matter may be collected from experiments. And let us compare the known conſtitution and courſe of things, with what is ſaid to be the moral ſyſtem of nature; the acknowledged diſpenſations of providence, or that government which we find our ſelves under, with what religion teaches us to believe and expect;

and see whether they are not analogous and of a piece. And upon such a comparison, it will I think be found, that they are very much so: that both may be traced up to the same general laws, and resolved into the same principles of divine conduct.

12

The analogy here proposed to be considered, is of pretty large extent, and consists of several parts; in some, more, in others, less, exact. In some few instances perhaps it may amount to a real practical proof; in others not so. Yet in these it is a confirmation of what is proved other ways. It will undeniably show, what too many want to have shown them, that the system of religion both natural and revealed, considered only as a system, and prior to the proof of it, is not a subject of ridicule, unless that of nature be so too. And it will afford an answer to almost all objections against the system both of natural and revealed religion; though not perhaps an answer in so great a degree; yet in a very considerable degree an answer, to the objections against the evidence of it: For objections against a proof, and objections against what is said to be proved, the reader will observe are different things.

13

Now the divine government of the world, implied in the notion of religion in general and of Christianity, contains in it; That mankind is appointed to live in a future state*; That there, every one shall be rewarded or punished†; rewarded or

* Ch. i. † Ch. ii.

puniſhed reſpectively for all that behaviour here, which we comprehend under the words, virtuous or vitious, morally good or evil*: That our preſent life is a probation, a ſtate of trial†, and of diſcipline‡, for that future one; notwithſtanding the objections, which men may fancy they have, from notions of neceſſity, againſt there being any ſuch moral plan as this at all§: And whatever objections may appear to lie againſt the wiſdom and goodneſs of it, as it ſtands ſo imperfectly made known to us at preſent:** That this world being in a ſtate of apoſtacy and wickedneſs, and conſequently of ruin, and the ſenſe both of their condition and duty being greatly corrupted among men, this gave occaſion for an additional diſpenſation of providence; of the utmoſt importance††; proved by miracles§§; but containing in it many things appearing to us ſtrange and not to have been expected‖; a diſpenſation of providence, which is a ſcheme or ſyſtem of things‡‡; carried on by the mediation of a divine perſon, the Meſſiah, in order to the recovery of the world‡‡; yet not revealed to all men, nor proved with the ſtrongeſt poſſible evidence to all thoſe to whom it is revealed; but only to ſuch a part of mankind, and with ſuch particular evidence as the wiſdom of God thought fit.§§ The deſign then of the following treatiſe will be to ſhew, that the ſeveral parts principally objected againſt in this moral and chriſtian diſpenſation, in-

* Ch. iii. † Ch. iv. ‡ Ch. v. § Ch. vi.
** Ch. vii. †† Part II. Ch. i. §§ Ch. ii.
‖ Ch. iii. ‡‡ Ch. iv. ‡‡ Ch. v. §§ Ch. vi, vii.

cluding its ſcheme, its publication, and the proof which God has afforded us of its truth; that the particular parts principally objected againſt in this whole diſpenſation, are analagous to what is experienced in the conſtitution and courſe of nature, or providence; that the chief objections themſelves which are alledged againſt the former, are no other, than what may be alledged with like juſtneſs againſt the latter, where they are found in fact to be incluſive; and that this argument from analogy is in general, unanſwerable, and undoubtedly of weight on the ſide of religion*, notwithſtanding the objections which may ſeem to lie againſt it, and the real ground which there may be for difference of opinion, as to the particular degree of weight which is to be laid upon it. This is a general account of what may be looked for in the following treatiſe. And I ſhall begin it with that which is the foundation of all our hopes and of all our fears; all our hopes and fears, which are of any conſideration; I mean a future life.

* Ch. viii.

THE ANALOGY OF RELIGION TO THE Conſtitution and Courſe of NATURE.

PART I.

Of NATURAL RELIGION.

CHAP. I.

Of a Future Life.

STRANGE difficulties have been raiſed by ſome concerning perſonal identity, or the ſameneſs of living agents, implied in the notion of our exiſting now and hereafter, or in any two ſucceſſive moments; which whoever thinks it worth while, may ſee conſidered in the firſt diſſertation at the end of this treatiſe. But without regard to any of them here, let us conſider what the analogy of nature, and the ſeveral changes which we have undergone, and thoſe which we know we may under-

go without being deſtroyed, ſuggeſt, as to the effect which death may, or may not have upon us; and whether it be not from thence probable, that we may ſurvive this change, and exiſt in a future ſtate of life and perception.

I. FROM our being born into the preſent world in the helpleſs imperfect ſtate of infancy, and having arrived from thence to mature age, we find it to be a general law of nature in our own ſpecies, that the ſame creatures, the ſame individuals, ſhould exiſt in degrees of life and perception, with capacities of action, of enjoyment and ſuffering, in one period of their being, greatly different from thoſe appointed them in another period of it. And in other creatures the ſame law holds. For the difference of their capacities and ſtates of life at their birth (to go no higher) and in maturity; the change of worms into flies, and the vaſt enlargement of their locomotive powers by ſuch change: and birds and inſects burſting the ſhell their habitation, and by this means entering into a new world, furniſhed with new accommodations for them, and finding a new ſphere of action aſſigned them; theſe are inſtances of this general law of nature. Thus all the various and wonderful transformation of animals are to be taken into conſideration here. But the ſtates of life in which we ourſelves exiſted formerly in the womb and in our infancy, are almoſt as different from our preſent in mature age, as it is poſſible to conceive any two ſtates or degrees of life can be. Therefore, that we are to exiſt hereafter in a ſtate as different (ſuppoſe) from our preſent, as this is

from our former, is but according to the analogy of nature; according to a natural order or appointment of the very ſame kind, with what we have already experienced.

II. WE know we are endued with capacities of action, of happineſs and miſery: for we are conſcious of acting, of injoying pleaſure and ſuffering pain. Now that we have theſe powers and capacities before death, is a preſumption that we ſhall retain them through and after death; indeed a probability of it abundantly ſufficient to act upon, unleſs there be ſome poſitive reaſon to think that death is the deſtruction of thoſe living powers: Becauſe there is in every caſe a probability, that all things will continue as we experience they are, in all reſpects, except thoſe in which we have ſome reaſon to think they will be altered. This is that *Kind** of preſumption or probability from analogy, expreſſed in the very word *Continuance*, which ſeems our only natural reaſon for believing the courſe of the world will continue to-morrow, as it has done ſo far as our experience or knowledge of hiſtory can carry us back. Nay it ſeems our only reaſon for believing, that any one ſubſtance now exiſting, will continue to exiſt a moment longer; the Self-exiſtent Subſtance only excepted. Thus if men were aſſured that the unknown event death, was not the deſtruction of our faculties of perception

* I ſay a KIND of preſumption or probability; for I do not mean to affirm that there is the ſame DEGREE of conviction, that our living powers will continue after death, as there is, that our ſubſtances will.

and of action, there would be no apprehenſion, that any other power or event unconnected with this of death, would deſtroy theſe faculties juſt at the inſtant of each creature's death; and therefore no doubt but that they would remain after it: which ſhows the high probability that our living powers will continue after death, unleſs there be ſome ground to think that death is their deſtruction *. For, if it would be in a manner certain that we ſhould ſurvive death, provided it were certain that death would not be our deſtruction, it muſt be highly probable we ſhall ſurvive it, if there be no ground to think death will be our deſtruction.

4 Now though I think it muſt be acknowledged, that prior to the natural and moral proofs of a future life commonly inſiſted upon, there would ariſe a general confuſed ſuſpicion, that in the great ſhock and alteration which we ſhall undergo by death, We, *i. e.* our living powers, might be wholly deſtroyed; yet even prior to thoſe proofs, there is really no particular diſtinct ground or reaſon

* *Deſtruction of living powers*, is a manner of expreſſion unavoidably ambiguous; and may ſignify either *the deſtruction of a living being, ſo as that the ſame living being ſhall be uncapable of ever perceiving or acting again at all*: Or *the deſtruction of thoſe means and inſtruments by which it is capable of its preſent life, of its preſent ſtate of perception and of action.* It is here uſed in the former ſenſe. When it is uſed in the latter, the epithet PRESENT is added. The loſs of a man's eye is a deſtruction of living powers in the latter ſenſe. But we have no reaſon to think the deſtruction of living powers, in the former ſenſe, to be poſſible. We have no more reaſon to think a being endued with living powers, ever loſes them during its whole exiſtence than to believe that a ſtone ever acquires them.

for this apprehenſion at all, ſo far as I can find. If there be, it muſt ariſe either, from *the reaſon of the thing*, or from *the analogy of nature*.

5

BUT we cannot argue from *the reaſon of the thing*, that death is the deſtruction of living agents, becauſe we know not at all what death is in itſelf; but only ſome of its effects, ſuch as the diſſolution of fleſh, ſkin, and bones. And theſe effects do in no wiſe appear to imply the deſtruction of a living agent. And beſides, as we are greatly in the dark, upon what the exerciſe of our living powers depends, ſo we are wholly ignorant what the powers themſelves depend upon; the powers themſelves as diſtinguiſhed, not only from their actual exerciſe, but alſo from the preſent capacity of exerciſing them; and as oppoſed to their deſtruction: For ſleep, or however a ſwoon, ſhews us, not only that theſe powers exiſt when they are not exerciſed, as the paſſive power of motion does in inanimate matter; but ſhews alſo that they exiſt, when there is no preſent capacity of exerciſing them: or that the capacities of exerciſing them for the preſent, as well as the actual exerciſe of them, may be ſuſpended, and yet the powers themſelves remain undeſtroyed. Since then we know not at all upon what the exiſtence of our living powers depends, this ſhews further, there can no probability be collected from the reaſon of the thing, that death will be their deſtruction: becauſe their exiſtence may depend, upon ſomewhat in no degree affected by death; upon ſomewhat quite out of the reach of this king of terrors. So that there is nothing

more certain, than that *the reaſon of the thing* ſhews us no connection between death, and the deſtruction of living agents. Nor can we find any thing throughout the whole *Analogy of Nature*, to afford us even the ſlighteſt preſumption, that animals ever loſe their living powers; much leſs, if it were poſſible, that they loſe them by death: for we have no faculties wherewith to trace any beyond or through it, ſo as to ſee what becomes of them. This event removes them from our view. It deſtroys the *ſenſible* proof, which we had before their death, of their being poſſeſſed of living powers, but does not appear to afford the leaſt reaſon to believe that they are, then, or by that event, deprived of them.

6 AND our knowing, that they were poſſeſſed of theſe powers, up to the very period to which we have faculties capable of tracing them, is itſelf a probability of their retaining them, beyond it. And this is confirmed, and a ſenſible credibility is given to it, by obſerving the very great and aſtoniſhing changes which we have experienced; ſo great, that our exiſtence in another ſtate of life, of perception and of action, will be but according to a method of providential conduct, the like to which has been already exerciſed even with regard to ourſelves; according to a courſe of nature, the like to which, we have already gone through.

7 HOWEVER, as one cannot but be greatly ſenſible, how difficult it is to ſilence imagination enough to make the voice of reaſon even diſtinctly heard in

this caſe; as we are accuſtomed, from our youth up, to indulge that forward, deluſive faculty, ever obtruding beyond its ſphere; of ſome aſſiſtance indeed to apprehenſion, but the author of all error: As we plainly loſe ourſelves in groſs and crude conceptions of things, taking for granted that we are acquainted with, what indeed we are wholly ignorant of; it may be proper to conſider the imaginary preſumptions, that death will be our deſtruction, ariſing from theſe kinds of early and laſting prejudices; and to ſhew how little they can really amount to, even though we cannot wholly diveſt ourſelves of them. And,

I. ALL preſumption of death's being the deſtruction of living beings, muſt go upon ſuppoſition that they are compounded; and ſo, diſcerptible. But ſince conſciouſneſs is a ſingle and indiviſible power, it ſhould ſeem that the ſubject in which it reſides, muſt be ſo too. For were the motion of any particle of matter abſolutely one and indiviſible, ſo as it ſhould imply a contradiction to ſuppoſe part of this motion to exiſt, and part not to exiſt, *i. e.* part of this matter to move, and part to be at reſt; then its power of motion would be indiviſible; and ſo alſo would be the ſubject in which the power inheres, namely the particle of matter: for if this could be divided into two, one part might be moved and the other at reſt, which is contrary to the ſuppoſition. In like manner it has been argued *, and, for any thing appearing to the contrary, juſtly, that ſince

* See Dr. Clarke's letter to Mr. Dodwell, and the defences of it.

the perception or conſciouſneſs, which we have o
our own exiſtence, is indiviſible, ſo as that it is
contradiction to ſuppoſe one part of it ſhould b
here and the other there; the perceptive power, o
the power of conſciouſneſs, is indiviſible too: an
conſequently the ſubject in which it reſides; *i. e.* th
conſcious being. Now upon ſuppoſition that livin
agent each man calls Himſelf, is thus a ſingle being
which there is at leaſt no more difficulty in conceiv
ing than in conceiving it to be a compound, and o
which there is the proof now mentioned; it follows
that our organized bodies are no more Ourſelves o
part of Ourſelves, than any other matter around us
And it is as eaſy to conceive, how matter, which i
no part of Ourſelves, may be appropriated to us in
the manner which our preſent bodies are; as how
we can receive impreſſions from, and have power
over any matter. It is as eaſy to conceive, that we
may exiſt out of bodies, as in them: that we might
have animated bodies of any other organs and ſenſes
wholly different from theſe now given us, and that
we may hereafter animate theſe ſame or new bodies
variouſly modified and organized; as to conceive
how we can animate ſuch bodies as our preſent.
And laſtly, the diſſolution of all theſe ſeveral orga-
nized bodies, ſuppoſing Ourſelves to have ſucceſſively
animated them, would have no more conceivable
tendency to deſtroy the living beings Ourſelves, or
deprive us of living faculties, the faculties of per-
ception and of action, than the diſſolution of any
foreign matter, which we are capable of receiving
impreſſions from, and making uſe of for the com-
mon occaſions of life.

II. THE ſimplicity and abſolute oneneſs of a living agent cannot indeed, from the nature of the thing, be properly proved, by experimental obſervations. But as theſe *fall in* with the ſuppoſition of its Unity, ſo they plainly lead us to *conclude* certainly, that our groſs organized bodies, with which we perceive the objects of ſenſe, and with which we act, are no part of Ourſelves; and therefore ſhow us, that we have no reaſon to believe their deſtruction to be ours: even without determining whether our living ſubſtances be material or immaterial. For we ſee by experience, that men may loſe their limbs, their organs of ſenſe, and even the greateſt part of theſe bodies, and yet remain the ſame living agents. And perſons can trace up the exiſtence of themſelves to a time, when the bulk of their bodies was extremely ſmall, in compariſon of what it is in mature age: and we cannot but think, that they might then have loſt a conſiderable part of that ſmall body, and yet have remained the ſame living agents; as they may now loſe great part of their preſent body, and remain ſo. As it is certain, that the bodies of all animals are in a conſtant flux, from that never-ceaſing attrition, which there is in every part of them. Now things of this kind unavoidably teach us to diſtinguiſh, between theſe living agents Ourſelves, and large quantities of matter, in which we are very nearly intereſted: ſince theſe may be alienated, and actually are in a daily courſe of ſucceſſion, and changing their owners; whilſt we are aſſured, that each living agent remains one and

the ſame permanent being*. And this general obſervation leads us on to the following ones.

10 *Firſt*, THAT we have no way of determining by experience, what is the certain bulk of the living being each man calls Himſelf: and yet, till it be determined that it is larger in bulk than the ſolid elementary particles of matter, which there is no ground to think any natural power can diſſolve, there is no ſort of reaſon to think death to be the diſſolution of it, of the living being, even though it ſhould not be abſolutely indiſcerptible.

11 *Secondly*, FROM our being ſo nearly related to and intereſted in certain ſyſtems of matter, ſuppoſe our fleſh and bones, and afterwards ceaſing to be at all related to them, the living agents Ourſelves remaining all this while undeſtroyed notwithſtanding ſuch alienation; and conſequently theſe ſyſtems of matter not being Ourſelves: it follows further, that we have no ground to conclude any other, ſuppoſe *internal ſyſtems* of matter, to be the living agents Ourſelves; becauſe we can have no ground to conclude this, but from our relation to and intereſt in ſuch other ſyſtems of matter: and therefore we can have no reaſon to conclude, what befalls thoſe ſyſtems of matter at death, to be the deſtruction of the living agents. We have already ſeveral times over loſt a great part or perhaps the whole of our body, according to certain common eſtabliſhed laws of nature; yet we remain the ſame living agents:

* See Diſſertation 1.

When we ſhall loſe as great a part, or the whole, by another common eſtabliſhed law of nature, death; why may we not alſo remain the ſame? That the alienation has been gradual in one caſe, and in the other will be more at once, does not prove any thing to the contrary. We have paſſed undeſtroyed through thoſe many and great revolutions of matter, ſo peculiarly appropriated to us ourſelves; why ſhould we imagine death will be ſo fatal to us? nor can it be objected, that what is thus alienated or loſt, is no part of our original ſolid body, but only adventitious matter; becauſe we may loſe intire limbs, which muſt have contained many ſolid parts and veſſels of the original body: or if this be not admitted, we have no proof, that any of theſe ſolid parts are diſſolved or alienated by death. Though, by the way, we are very nearly related to that extraneous or adventitious matter, whilſt it continues united to and diſtending the ſeveral parts of our ſolid body. But after all; the relation a perſon bears to thoſe parts of his body, to which he is the moſt nearly related; what does it appear to amount to but this, that the living agent, and thoſe parts of the body, mutually affect each other? And the ſame thing, the ſame thing in kind, though not in degree, may be ſaid of *all foreign* matter, which gives us ideas, and which we have any power over. From theſe obſervations the whole ground of the imagination is removed, that the diſſolution of any matter, is the deſtruction of a living agent, from the intereſt he once had in ſuch matter.

12 *Thirdly*, If we conſider our body ſomewhat more diſtinctly, as made up of organs and inſtruments of perception and of motion, it will bring us to the ſame concluſion. Thus the common optical experiments ſhow, and even the obſervation how ſight is aſſiſted by glaſſes ſhows, that we ſee with our eyes in the ſame ſenſe as we ſee with glaſſes. Nor is there any reaſon to believe, that we ſee with them in any other ſenſe; any other, I mean, which would lead us to think the eye itſelf a percipient. The like is to be ſaid of hearing: and our feeling diſtant ſolid matter by means of ſomewhat in our hand, ſeems an inſtance of the like kind, as to the ſubject we are conſidering. All theſe are inſtances of foreign matter, or ſuch as is no part of our body, being inſtrumental in preparing objects for, and conveying them to, the perceiving power, in a manner ſimilar or like to the manner, in which our organs of ſenſe prepare and convey them. Both are in a like way inſtruments of our receiving ſuch ideas from external objects, as the Author of Nature appointed thoſe external objects to be the occaſions of exciting in us. However, glaſſes are evidently inſtances of this; namely of matter, which is no part of our body, preparing objects for and conveying them towards the perceiving power, in like manner as our bodily organs do. And if we ſee with our eyes only in the ſame manner as we do with glaſſes, the like may juſtly be concluded, from analogy, of all our other ſenſes. It is not intended, by any thing here ſaid, to affirm, that the whole apparatus of viſion, or of perception by any other of our ſenſes, can be traced, through all its ſteps, quite up to

the living power of seeing, or perceiving: But that so far as it can be traced by experimental observations, so far it appears, that our organs of sense prepare and convey on objects, in order to their being perceived, in like manner as foreign matter does, without affording any shadow of appearance, that they themselves perceive. And that we have no reason to think our organs of sense percipients, is confirmed by instances of persons losing some of them, the living beings themselves, their former occupiers, remaining unimpaired. It is confirmed also by the experience of dreams; by which we find we are at present possessed of a latent, and, what would otherwise be, an unimagined unknown power of perceiving sensible objects, in as strong and lively a manner without our external organs of sense as with them.

So also with regard to our power of moving, or directing motion by will and choice: upon the destruction of a limb, this active power remains, as it evidently seems, unlessened; so as that the living being, who has suffered this loss, would be capable of moving as before, if it had another limb to move with. It can walk by the help of an artificial leg; just as it can make use of a pole or a leaver, to reach towards itself and to move things, beyond the length and the power of its natural arm: And this last it does in the same manner as it reaches and moves, with its natural arm, things nearer and of less weight. Nor is there so much as any appearance of our limbs being endued with a power of moving or directing themselves; though they are adapted, like the several parts of a machine, to be

the inſtruments of motion to each other; and ſome parts of the ſame limb, to be inſtruments of motion to other parts of it.

14 THUS a man determines, that he will look at ſuch an object through a microſcope; or being lame ſuppoſe, that he will walk to ſuch a place with a ſtaff a week hence. His eyes and his feet no more determine in theſe caſes, than the microſcope and the ſtaff. Nor is there any ground to think they any more put the determination in practice; or that his eyes are the ſeers or his feet the movers, in any other ſenſe than as the microſcope and the ſtaff are. Upon the whole then, our organs of ſenſe and our limbs are certainly inſtruments, which the living perſons Ourſelves make uſe of to perceive and move with: There is not any probability, that they are any more; nor conſequently, that we have any other kind of relation to them, than what we may have to any other foreign matter formed into inſtruments of perception and motion, ſuppoſe into a microſcope or a ſtaff; (I ſay any other kind of relation, for I am not ſpeaking of the degree of it) nor conſequently is there any probability, that the alienation or diſſolution of theſe inſtruments is the deſtruction of the perceiving and moving agent.

15 AND thus our finding, that the diſſolution of matter, in which living beings were moſt nearly intereſted, is not their diſſolution; and that the deſtruction of ſeveral of the organs and inſtruments of perception and of motion belonging to them, is not their deſtruction; ſhows demonſtratively, that there is no ground to think that the diſſolution of any

other matter, or deſtruction of any other organs and inſtruments, will be the diſſolution or deſtruction of living agents, from the like kind of relation. And we have no reaſon to think we ſtand in any other kind of relation to any thing which we find diſſolved by death.

BUT it is ſaid theſe obſervations are equally applicable to brutes: and it is thought an inſuperable difficulty, that they ſhould be immortal, and by conſequence capable of everlaſting happineſs. Now this manner of expreſſion is both invidious and weak: but the thing intended by it, is really no difficulty at all, either in the way of natural or moral conſideration. For *1ſt.* Suppoſe the invidious thing, deſigned in ſuch a manner of expreſſion, were really implied, as it is not in the leaſt, in the natural immortality of brutes; namely, that they muſt arrive at great attainments, and become rational and moral agents; even this would be no difficulty: ſince we know not what latent powers and capacities they may be endued with. There was once, prior to experience, as great preſumption againſt human creatures, as there is againſt the brute creatures, arriving at that degree of underſtanding, which we have in mature age. For we can trace up our own exiſtence to the ſame original with Theirs. And we find it to be a general law of nature, that creatures endued with capacities of virtue and religion, ſhould be placed in a condition of being, in which they are altogether without the uſe of Them, for a conſiderable length of their duration; as in infancy and childhood. And great

part of the human ſpecies go out of the preſent world, before they come to the exerciſe of theſe capacities in any degree at all. But then 2*dly*. The natural immortality of brutes, does not in the leaſt imply, that they are endued with any latent capacities of a rational or moral nature. And the oeconomy of the univerſe might require, that there ſhould be living creatures, without any capacities of this kind. And all difficulties as to the manner how they are to be diſpoſed of, are ſo apparently and wholly founded in our ignorance, that it is wonderful they ſhould be inſiſted upon by any, but ſuch as are weak enough to think they are acquainted with the whole ſyſtem of things. There is then abſolutely nothing at all in this objection, which is ſo rhetorically urged, againſt the greateſt part of the natural proofs or preſumptions of the immortality of human minds: I ſay the greateſt part; for it is leſs applicable to the following obſervation, which is more peculiar to mankind:

III. THAT as it is evident our *preſent* powers and capacities of reaſon, memory, and affection, do not depend upon our groſs body in the manner in which perception by our organs of ſenſe does; ſo they do not appear to depend upon it at all in any ſuch manner, as to give ground to think, that the diſſolution of this body, will be the deſtruction of theſe our *preſent* powers of reflection, as it will of our powers of ſenſation; or to give ground to conclude, even that it will be ſo much as a ſuſpenſion of the former.

HUMAN creatures exiſt at preſent in two ſtates of life and perception, greatly different from each o-

ther; each of which has its own peculiar laws, and its own peculiar enjoyments and ſufferings. When any of our ſenſes are affected or appetites gratified with the objects of Them, we may be ſaid to exiſt or live in a ſtate of ſenſation. When none of our ſenſes are affected or appetites gratified, and yet we perceive and reaſon and act; we may be ſaid to exiſt or live in a ſtate of reflection. Now it is by no means certain, that any thing which is diſſolved by death, is any way neceſſary to the living being in this its ſtate of reflection, after ideas are gained. For, though from our preſent conſtitution and condition of being, our external organs of ſenſe are neceſſary for conveying in ideas to our reflecting powers, as carriages and leavers and ſcaffolds are in architecture: yet when theſe ideas are brought in, we are capable of reflecting in the moſt intenſe degree, and of enjoying the greateſt pleaſure and feeling the greateſt pain by means of that reflection, without any aſſiſtance from our ſenſes; and without any at all, which we know of, from that body, which will be diſſolved by death. It does not appear then, that the relation of this groſs body to the reflecting being, is, in any degree, neceſſary to thinking; to our intellectual enjoyments or ſufferings: nor conſequently, that the diſſolution or alienation of the former by death, will be the deſtruction of thoſe preſent powers, which render us capable of this ſtate of reflection. Further, there are inſtances of mortal diſeaſes, which do not at all affect our preſent intellectual powers; and this affords a preſumption, that thoſe diſeaſes will not deſtroy theſe preſent powers. Indeed, from the ob-

ſervations made above*, it appears, that there is no preſumption, from their mutually affecting each other, that the diſſolution of the body is the deſtruction of the living agent. And by the ſame reaſoning, it muſt appear too, that there is no preſumption, from their mutually affecting each other, that the diſſolution of the body is the deſtruction of our preſent reflecting powers: But inſtances of their not affecting each other, afford a preſumption of the contrary. Inſtances of mortal diſeaſes not impairing our preſent reflecting powers, evidently turn our thoughts even from imagining ſuch diſeaſes to be the deſtruction of them. Several things indeed greatly affect all our living powers, and at length ſuſpend the exerciſe of them; as for inſtance drowſineſs, increaſing till it ends in ſound ſleep: and from hence we might have imagined it would deſtroy them, till we found by experience the weakneſs of this way of judging. But in the diſeaſes now mentioned, there is not ſo much as this ſhadow of probability, to lead us to any ſuch concluſion, as to the reflecting powers which we have at preſent. For in thoſe diſeaſes, perſons the moment before death appear to be in the higheſt vigour of life. They diſcover apprehenſion, memory, reaſon, all entire; with the utmoſt force of affection; ſenſe of a character, of ſhame and honour; and the higheſt mental enjoyments and ſufferings, even to the laſt gaſp: and theſe ſurely prove even greater vigour of life than bodily ſtrength does. Now what pretence is there for thinking, that a

* P. 24, 25, 26.

progreſſive diſeaſe when arrived to ſuch a degree, I mean that degree which is mortal, will deſtroy thoſe powers, which were not impaired, which were not affected by it, during its whole progreſs quite up to that degree? And if death by diſeaſes of this kind, is not the deſtruction of our preſent reflecting powers, it will ſcarce be thought that death by any other means is.

IT is obvious that this general obſervation may be carried on further: and there appears ſo little connection between our bodily powers of ſenſation, and our preſent powers of reflection, that there is no reaſon to conclude, that death, which deſtroys the former, does ſo much as ſuſpend the exerciſe of the latter, or interrupt our *continuing* to exiſt in the like ſtate of reflection which we do now. For ſuſpenſion of reaſon, memory, and the affections which they excite, is no part of the idea of death, nor is implied in our notion of it. And our daily experiencing theſe powers to be exerciſed, without any aſſiſtance, that we know of, from thoſe bodies, which will be diſſolved by death; and our finding often, that the exerciſe of them is ſo lively to the laſt; theſe things afford a ſenſible apprehenſion, that death may not perhaps be ſo much as a diſcontinuance of the exerciſe of theſe powers, nor of the enjoyments and ſufferings which it implies*. So that our poſthumous life, whatever

* There are three diſtinct queſtions, relating to a future life, here conſidered: whether death be the deſtruction of living agents; if not, whether it be the deſtruction of their PRESENT powers of reflection, as it certainly is the deſtruction of their preſent powers of ſenſation; and if not, whether it be the ſuſpenſion, or diſcontinu-

there may be in it additional to our preſent, yet may not be entirely beginning anew; but going on. Death may, in ſome ſort, and in ſome reſpects, anſwer to our birth; which is not a ſuſpenſion of the faculties which we had before it, or a total change of the ſtate of life in which we exiſted when in the womb; but a continuation of both, with ſuch and ſuch great alterations.

20 NAY, for ought we know of Ourſelves, of our preſent life and of death; death may immediately, in the natural courſe of things, put us into a higher and more enlarged ſtate of life, as our birth does†; a ſtate in which our capacities, and ſphere of perception and of action, may be much greater than at preſent. For as our relation to our external organs of ſenſe, renders us capable of exiſting in our preſent ſtate of ſenſation; ſo it may be the only natural hindrance to our exiſting, immediately and of courſe, in a higher ſtate of reflection. The truth is, reaſon does not at all ſhew us, in what ſtate death naturally leave us. But were we ſure, that it would ſuſpend all our perceptive and active powers; yet

ance of the exerciſe, of theſe preſent reflecting powers. Now if there be no reaſon to believe the laſt, there will be, if that were poſſible, leſs for the next, and leſs ſtill for the firſt.

† This according to Strabo was the opinion of the Brachmans, νομιζειν μεν γαρ δη τον μεν ενθαδε βιον, ως αν ακμην κυομενων ειναι· τον δε θανατον, γινεσιν εις τον οντως βιον, και τον ευδαιμονα τοις φιλοσοφησασι. Lib. XV. p. 1039. Ed. Am. 1707. To which opinion perhaps Antoninus may allude in theſe words, ως νυν περιμενεις, ποτε αμβρυον εκ της γαστρος της γυναικος σου εξελθη, ουτως εκδεχεσθαι την ωραν ιν' η το ψυχαριον σου τον ελυτρου τουτου εκπεσηται. Lib. IX. c. 3.

the ſuſpenſion of a power and the deſtruction of it, are effects ſo totally different in kind, as we experience from ſleep and a ſwoon, that we cannot in any wiſe argue from one to the other; or conclude even to the loweſt degree of probability, that the ſame kind of force which is ſufficient to ſuſpend our faculties, though it be increaſed ever ſo much, will be ſufficient to deſtroy them.

THESE obſervations together may be ſufficient to ſhew, how little preſumption there is, that death is the deſtruction of human creatures. However there is the ſhadow of an analogy, which may lead us to imagine it is; the ſuppoſed likeneſs which is obſerved between the decay of vegetables, and of living creatures. And this likeneſs is indeed ſufficient to afford the poets very apt alluſions to the flowers of the field, in their pictures of the frailty of our preſent life. But in reaſon, the analogy is ſo far from holding, that there appears no ground even for the compariſon, as to the preſent queſtion: becauſe one of the two ſubjects compared, is wholly void of That, which is the principal and chief thing in the other, the power of perception and of action; and which is the only thing we are inquiring about the continuance of. So that the deſtruction of a vegetable, is an event not ſimilar or analogous to the deſtruction of a living agent.

BUT if, as was above intimated, leaving off the deluſive cuſtom of ſubſtituting imagination in the room of experience, we would confine ourſelves to what we do know and underſtand; if we would argue only from That, and from That form our expecta-

tions; it would appear at firſt ſight, that as no probability of living beings ever ceaſing to be ſo, can be concluded from the reaſon of the thing; ſo none can be collected from the analogy of nature; becauſe we cannot trace any living beings beyond death. But as we are conſcious, that we are endued with capacities of perception and of action, and are living perſons; what we are to go upon is, that we ſhall continue ſo, till we foreſee ſome accident or event, which will endanger thoſe capacities, or be likely to deſtroy us: which death does in no wiſe appear to be.

23 And thus, when we go out of this world, we may paſs into new ſcenes, and a new ſtate of life and action, juſt as naturally as we came into the preſent. And this new ſtate may naturally be a ſocial one. And the advantages of it, advantages of every kind, may naturally be beſtowed, according to ſome fixt general laws of wiſdom, upon every one in proportion to the degrees of his virtue. And though the advantages of that future natural ſtate, ſhould not be beſtowed, as theſe of the preſent in ſome meaſure are, by the will of the ſociety; but entirely by his more immediate action, upon whom the whole frame of nature depends: yet this diſtribution may be juſt as natural, as their being diſtributed here by the inſtrumentality of men. And indeed, though one were to allow any confuſed undetermined ſenſe, which people pleaſe to put upon the word *natural*, it would be a ſhortneſs of thought ſcarce credible, to imagine, that no ſyſtem or courſe

of things can be ſo, but only what we ſee at preſent: eſpecially whilſt the probability of a future life, or the natural immortality of the ſoul, is admitted upon the evidence of reaſon; becauſe this is really both admitting and denying at once, a ſtate of being different from the preſent to be natural. But the only diſtinct meaning of that word is *ſtated*, *fixed*, or *ſettled*: ſince what is natural, as much requires and preſuppoſes an intelligent agent to render it ſo, *i. e.* to effect it continually, or at ſtated times; as what is ſupernatural or miraculous does to effect it for once. And from hence it muſt follow, that perſons notion of what is natural, will be enlarged in proportion to their greater knowledge of the works of God, and the diſpenſations of his providence. Nor is there any abſurdity in ſuppoſing, that there may be beings in the univerſe, whoſe capacities, and knowledge, and views, may be ſo extenſive, as that the whole Chriſtian diſpenſation may to them appear natural, *i. e.* analogous or conformable to God's dealings with other parts of his creation; as natural as the viſible known courſe of things appears to us. For there ſeems ſcarce any other poſſible ſenſe to be put upon the word, but that only in which it is here uſed; ſimilar, ſtated, or uniform.

THIS credibility of a future life, which has been here inſiſted upon, how little ſoever it may ſatisfy our curioſity, ſeems to anſwer all the purpoſes of religion, in like manner as a demonſtrative proof

* See Part II. Ch. ii. and Ch. iii.

would. Indeed a proof, even a demonſtrative one, of a future life, would not be a proof of religion. For, that we are to live hereafter, is juſt as reconcileable with the ſcheme of Atheiſm, and as well to be accounted for by it, as that we are now alive, is: and therefore nothing can be more abſurd than to argue from that ſcheme, that there can be no future ſtate. But as religion implies a future ſtate, any preſumption againſt ſuch a ſtate, is a preſumption againſt religion. And the foregoing obſervations remove all preſumptions of that ſort, and prove, to a very conſiderable degree of probability, one fundamental doctrine of religion; which, if believed, would greatly open and diſpoſe the mind ſeriouſly to attend to the general evidence of the whole.

PART I.

CHAP. II.

Of the Government of God by Rewards and Puniſhments; and particularly of the latter.

THAT which makes the queſtion concerning a future life to be of ſo great importance to us, is our capacity of happineſs and miſery. And that which makes the conſideration of it to be of ſo great importance to us, is the ſuppoſition of our happineſs and miſery hereafter, depending upon our actions here. Without this indeed, curioſity could not but ſometimes bring a ſubject, in which we may be ſo highly intereſted, to our thoughts; eſpecially upon the mortality of others, or the near proſpect of our own. But reaſonable men would not take any farther thought about hereafter, than what ſhould happen thus occaſionally to riſe in their minds, if it were certain, that our future intereſt no way depended upon our preſent behaviour: Whereas on the contrary, if there be ground, either from analogy or any thing elſe, to think it does; then there is reaſon alſo for the moſt active thought and ſollicitude, to ſecure that intereſt; to behave ſo as that we may eſcape that miſery, and obtain that happineſs in another life, which we not only ſuppoſe ourſelves capable of, but which we

apprehend alſo is put in our own power. And whether there be ground for this laſt apprehenſion, certainly would deſerve to be moſt ſeriouſly conſidered, were there no other proof of a future life and intereſt, than that preſumptive one, which the foregoing obſervations amount to.

2 Now in the preſent ſtate, all which we enjoy, and a great part of what we ſuffer, *is put in our own power.* For pleaſure and pain are the conſequences of our actions; and we are endued by the Author of our nature with capacities of foreſeeing theſe conſequences. We find by experience He does not ſo much as preſerve our lives, excluſively of our own care and attention, to provide ourſelves with, and to make uſe of, that ſuſtenance, by which he has appointed our lives ſhall be preſerved; and without which, he has appointed, they ſhall not be preſerved at all. And in general we foreſee, that the external things, which are the objects of our various paſſions, can neither be obtained nor enjoyed, without exerting ourſelves in ſuch and ſuch manners: But by thus exerting ourſelves, we obtain and enjoy theſe objects, in which our natural good conſiſts; or by this means God gives us the poſſeſſion and enjoyment of them. I know not, that we have any one kind or degree of enjoyment, but by the means of our own actions. And by prudence and care, we may, for the moſt part, paſs our days in tolerable eaſe and quiet: Or on the contrary, we may by raſhneſs, ungoverned paſſion, willfulneſs, or even by negligence, make ourſelves as miſerable as ever we pleaſe. And many do pleaſe to make them-

ſelves extremely miſerable, *i. e.* to do what they know beforehand will render them ſo. They follow thoſe ways, the fruit of which they know, by inſtruction, example, experience, will be diſgrace and poverty and ſickneſs and untimely death. This every one obſerves to be the general courſe of things; though it is to be allowed, we cannot find by experience, that all our ſufferings are owing to our own follies.

WHY the Author of Nature does not give his creatures promiſcuouſly ſuch and ſuch perceptions, without regard to their behaviour; why he does not make them happy without the inſtrumentality of their own actions, and prevent their bringing any ſufferings upon themſelves; is another matter. Perhaps there may be ſome impoſſibilities in the nature of things, which we are unacquainted with*. Or leſs happineſs, it may be, would upon the whole be produced by ſuch a method of conduct, than is by the preſent. Or perhaps Divine goodneſs, with which, if I miſtake not, we make very free in our ſpeculations, may not be a bare ſingle diſpoſition to produce happineſs; but a diſpoſition to make the good, the faithful, the honeſt man happy. Perhaps an infinitely perfect Mind may be pleaſed, with ſeeing his creatures behave ſuitably to the nature which he has given them; to the relations which he has placed them in to each other; and to that, which they ſtand in to Himſelf: That relation to himſelf, which, during their exiſtence, is even neceſſary, and which is the moſt important one of

* Ch. vii.

all: perhaps, I ſay, an infinitely perfect Mind may be pleaſed with this moral piety of moral agents, in and for itſelf; as well as upon account of its being eſſentially conducive to the happineſs of his creation. Or the whole end, for which God made, and thus governs the world, may be utterly beyond the reach of our faculties: There may be ſomewhat in it as impoſſible for us to have any conception of, as for a blind man to have a conception of colours. But however this be, it is certain matter of univerſal experience, that the general method of Divine adminiſtration, is, forewarning us, or giving us capacities to foreſee, with more or leſs clearneſs, that if we act ſo and ſo, we ſhall have ſuch enjoyments, if ſo and ſo, ſuch ſufferings; and giving us thoſe enjoyments, and making us feel thoſe ſufferings, in conſequence of our actions.

4 "BUT all this is to be aſcribed to the general "courſe of nature." True. This is the very thing which I am obſerving. It is to be aſcribed to the general courſe of nature: *i. e.* not ſurely to the words or ideas, *courſe of nature;* but to Him who appointed it, and put things into it: Or to a courſe of operation, from its uniformity or conſtancy, called natural*; and which neceſſarily implies an operating agent. For when men find themſelves neceſſitated to confeſs an Author of Nature, or that God is the natural governor of the world; they muſt not deny this again, becauſe his government is uniform: They muſt not deny that he does all

* P. 35, 37.

things at all, becauſe he does them conſtantly; becauſe the effects of his acting are permanent, whether his acting be ſo or not; though there is no reaſon to think it is not. In ſhort, every man, in every thing he does, naturally acts upon the forethought and apprehenſion of avoiding evil or obtaining good: And if the natural courſe of things be the appointment of God, and our natural faculties of knowledge and experience, are given us by him; then the good and bad conſequences which follow our actions, are his appointment, and our foreſight of thoſe conſequences, is a warning given us by Him, how we are to act.

"Is the pleaſure then, naturally accompanying "every particular gratification of paſſion, intended, "to put us upon gratifying ourſelves in every ſuch "particular inſtance, and as a reward to us for ſo "doing?" No certainly. Nor is it to be ſaid, that our eyes were naturally intended to give us the ſight of each particular object, to which they do or can extend; objects which are deſtructive of them, or which, for any other reaſon, it may become us to turn our eyes from. Yet there is no doubt, but that our eyes were intended for us to ſee with. So neither is there any doubt, but that the foreſeen pleaſures and pains belonging to the paſſions, were intended, in general, to induce mankind to act in ſuch and ſuch manners.

Now from this general obſervation, obvious to every one, that God has given us to underſtand, he has appointed ſatisfaction and delight to be the conſequence of our acting in one manner, and pain

and uneaſineſs of our acting in another, and of our not acting at all; and that we find the conſequences, which we were beforehand informed of, uniformly to follow; we may learn, that we are at preſent actually under his government in the ſtricteſt and moſt proper ſenſe; in ſuch a ſenſe, as that he rewards and puniſhes us for our actions. An Author of Nature being ſuppoſed, it is not ſo much a deduction of reaſon, as a matter of experience, that we are thus under his government: under his government, in the ſame ſenſe, as we are under the government of civil magiſtrates. Becauſe the annexing pleaſure to ſome actions, and pain to others, in our power to do or forbear, and giving notice of this appointment beforehand to thoſe whom it concerns; is the proper formal notion of government. Whether the pleaſure or pain which thus follows upon our behaviour, be owing to the Author of Nature's acting upon us every moment which we feel it; or to his having at once contrived and executed his own part in the plan of the world; makes no alteration as to the matter before us. For if civil magiſtrates could make the ſanctions of their laws take place, without interpoſing at all, after they had paſſed them; without a trial and the formalities of an execution: If they were able to make their laws execute themſelves, or every offender to execute them upon himſelf; we ſhould be juſt in the ſame ſenſe under their government then, as we are now, but in a much higher degree, and more perfect manner.——Vain is the ridicule, with which, one foreſees, ſome perſons will divert themſelves, upon finding leſſer pains conſidered as inſtances of

Divine puniſhment. There is no poſſibility of anſwering or evading the general thing here intended, without denying all final cauſes. For final cauſes being admitted, the pleaſures and pains now mentioned muſt be admitted too as inſtances of them. And if they are; if God annexes delight to ſome actions, and uneaſineſs to others, with an apparent deſign to induce us to act ſo and ſo; then He not only diſpenſes happineſs and miſery, but alſo rewards and puniſhes actions. If, for example, the pain which we feel, upon doing what tends to the deſtruction of our bodies, ſuppoſe upon too near approaches to fire, or upon wounding ourſelves, be appointed by the Author of Nature to prevent our doing what thus tends to our deſtruction; this is altogether as much an inſtance of his puniſhing our actions, and conſequently of our being under his government, as declaring by a voice from heaven, that if we acted ſo, he would inflict ſuch pain upon us, and inflicting it, whether it be greater or leſs.

THUS we find, that the true notion or conception of the Author of Nature, is that of a Maſter or Governor, prior to the conſideration of his moral attributes. The fact of our caſe, which we find by experience, is, that He actually exerciſes dominion or government over us at preſent, by rewarding and puniſhing us for our actions, in as ſtrict and proper a ſenſe of theſe words, and even in the ſame ſenſe, as children, ſervants, ſubjects, are rewarded and puniſhed by thoſe who govern them.

AND thus the whole analogy of nature, the whole preſent courſe of things, moſt fully ſhows, that

there is nothing incredible in the general doctrine of religion; that God will reward and puniſh men for their actions hereafter: nothing incredible, I mean, ariſing out of the notion of rewarding and puniſhing. For the whole courſe of nature is a preſent inſtance of his exerciſing that government over us, which implies in it rewarding and puniſhing.

9 BUT as Divine puniſhment is what men chiefly object againſt, and are moſt unwilling to allow; it may be proper to mention ſome circumſtances in the natural courſe of puniſhments at preſent, which are analogous to what religion teaches us concerning a future ſtate of puniſhment: Indeed ſo analogous, that as they add a farther credibility to it, ſo they cannot but raiſe a moſt ſerious apprehenſion of it in thoſe who will attend to them.

10 IT has been now obſerved, that ſuch and ſuch miſeries naturally follow ſuch and ſuch actions of imprudence and willfulneſs, as well as actions more commonly and more diſtinctly conſidered as vitious; and that theſe conſequences, when they may be foreſeen, are properly natural puniſhments annexed to ſuch actions. For the general thing here inſiſted upon, is, not that we ſee a great deal of miſery in the world, but a great deal which men bring upon themſelves by their own behaviour, which they might have foreſeen and avoided. Now the circumſtances of theſe natural puniſhments, particularly deſerving our attention, are ſuch as theſe; That oftentimes they follow, or are inflicted in conſequence

of actions, which procure many preſent advantages, and are accompanied with much preſent pleaſure: for inſtance, ſickneſs and untimely death is the conſequence of intemperance, though accompanied with the higheſt mirth and jollity: That theſe puniſhments are often much greater, than the advantages or pleaſures obtained by the actions, of which they are the puniſhments or conſequences: That though we may imagine a conſtitution of nature, in which theſe natural puniſhments, which are in fact to follow, would follow, immediately upon ſuch actions being done, or very ſoon after; we find on the contrary in our world, that they are often delayed a great while, ſometimes even till long after the actions occaſioning them are forgot; ſo that the conſtitution of nature is ſuch, that delay of puniſhment is no ſort nor degree of preſumption of final impunity: That after ſuch delay, theſe natural puniſhments or miſeries often come, not by degrees, but ſuddenly, with violence, and at once; however, the chief miſery often does: That as certainty of ſuch diſtant miſery following ſuch actions, is never afforded perſons; ſo perhaps during the actions, they have ſeldom a diſtinct full expectation of its following *: And many times the caſe is only thus, that they ſee in general, or may ſee, the credibility, that intemperance, ſuppoſe, will bring after it diſeaſes; civil crimes, civil puniſhments; when yet the real probability often is, that they ſhall eſcape; but things notwithſtanding take their deſtined courſe, and the miſery inevitably follows at its appointed time, in very many

* See Part II. Ch. vi.

of theſe caſes. Thus alſo though youth may be alledged as an excuſe for raſhneſs and folly, as being naturally thoughtleſs, and not clearly foreſeeing all the conſequences of being untractable and profligate; this does not hinder, but that theſe conſequences follow, and are grievouſly felt throughout the whole courſe of mature life. Habits contracted even in that age, are often utter ruin: And men's ſucceſs in the world, not only in the common ſenſe of worldly ſucceſs, but their real happineſs and miſery, depends in a great degree, and in various ways, upon the manner in which they paſs their youth; which conſequences they for the moſt part neglect to conſider, and perhaps ſeldom can properly be ſaid to believe, beforehand. It requires alſo to be mentioned, that in numberleſs caſes, the natural courſe of things affords us opportunities for procuring advantages to ourſelves at certain times, which we cannot procure when we will; nor ever recall the opportunities, if we have neglected them. Indeed the general courſe of nature is an example of this. If, during the opportunity of youth, perſons are indocile and ſelf-willed; they inevitably ſuffer in their future life, for want of thoſe acquirements, which they neglected the natural ſeaſon of attaining. If the huſbandman lets his ſeed-time paſs without ſowing, the whole year is loſt to him beyond recovery. In like manner, though after men have been guilty of folly and extravagance *up to a certain degree*, it is often in their power, for inſtance, to retrieve their affairs, to recover their health and character; at leaſt in good meaſure; yet real reformation is, in many caſes, of no avail

at all towards preventing the miſeries, poverty, ſickneſs, infamy, naturally annexed to folly and extravagance *exceeding that degree.* There is a certain bound to imprudence and miſbehaviour, which being tranſgreſſed, there remains no place for repentance in the natural courſe of things. It is further very much to be remarked, that neglects from inconſiderateneſs, want of attention*, not looking about us to ſee what we have to do, are often attended with conſequences altogether as dreadful, as any active miſbehaviour, from the moſt extravagant paſſion. And laſtly, civil government being natural, the puniſhments of it are ſo too: And ſome of theſe puniſhments are capital; as the effects of a diſſolute courſe of pleaſure are often mortal. So that many natural puniſhments are final † to him, who incurs them, if conſidered only in his temporal

* Part II. Chap. vi.

† The general conſideration of a future ſtate of puniſhment moſt evidently belongs to the ſubject of natural religion. But if any of theſe reflections ſhould be thought to relate more peculiarly to this doctrine as taught in Scripture; the reader is deſired to obſerve, that gentile writers, both moraliſts and poets, ſpeak of the future puniſhment of the wicked, both as to the duration and degree of it, in a like manner of expreſſion and of deſcription, as the Scripture does. So that all which can poſitively be aſſerted to be matter of mere revelation, with regard to this doctrine, ſeems to be, that the great diſtinction between the righteous and the wicked, ſhall be made at the end of this world; that each ſhall THEN receive according to his deſerts. Reaſon did, as it well might, conclude that it ſhould, finally and upon the whole, be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked: but it could not be determined, upon any principles of reaſon, whether human creatures might not have been appointed to paſs through other ſtates of life and being, before that diſtributive juſtice ſhould, finally and effectually take

capacity: and ſeem inflicted by natural appointment, either to remove the offender out of the way of being further miſchievous; or as an example, though frequently a diſregarded one, to thoſe who are left behind.

11 THESE things are not, what we call accidental, or to be met with only now and then; but they are things of every day's experience: They proceed from general laws, very general ones, by which God governs the world, in the natural courſe of his providence. And they are ſo analogous, to what religion teaches us concerning the future puniſhment of the wicked, ſo much of a piece with it, that both would naturally be expreſſed in the very ſame words, and manner of deſcription. In the Book of *Proverbs**, for inſtance, Wiſdom is introduced, as frequenting the moſt public places of reſort, and as rejected when ſhe offers herſelf as the natural appointed guide of human life. *How long*, ſpeaking to thoſe who are paſſing through it, *how long, ye ſimple ones, will ye love folly, and the ſcorners delight in their ſcorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my Spirit upon you, I will make known my words unto you.* But upon being neglected, *Becauſe I have called, and ye refuſed, I have ſtretched out my hand, and no man*

place. Revelation teaches us, that the next ſtate of things after the preſent, is appointed for the execution of this juſtice; that it ſhall be no longer delayed: but *the myſtery of God*, the great myſtery of his ſuffering vice and confuſion to prevail, *ſhall then be finiſhed*; and he will *take to him his great power and will reign*, by rendering to every one according to his works.

* Ch. i.

regarded; But ye have ſet at nought all my counſel, and would none of my reproof: I alſo will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as deſolation, and your deſtruction cometh as a whirlwind; when diſtreſs and anguiſh cometh upon you. Then ſhall they call upon me, but I will not anſwer; they ſhall ſeek me early, but they ſhall not find me. This paſſage, every one ſees, is poetical, and ſome parts of it are highly figurative; but their meaning is obvious. And the thing intended is expreſſed more literally in the following words; *For that they hated knowledge, and did not chuſe the fear of the Lord———therefore ſhall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the ſecurity of the ſimple ſhall ſlay them, and the proſperity of fools ſhall deſtroy them.* And the whole paſſage is ſo equally applicable, to what we experience in the preſent world, concerning the conſequences of men's actions, and to what religion teaches us is to be expected in another, that it may be queſtioned which of the two was principally intended.

INDEED when one has been recollecting the proper proofs of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, nothing methinks can give one ſo ſenſible an apprehenſion of the latter, or repreſentation of it to the mind; as obſerving, that after the many diſregarded checks, admonitions and warnings, which people meet with in the ways of vice and folly and extravagance; warnings from their very nature; from the examples of others; from the leſſer inconveni-

ences which they bring upon themſelves; from the inſtructions of wiſe and virtuous men: after theſe have been long deſpiſed, ſcorned, ridiculed: after the chief bad conſequences, temporal conſequences, of their follies, have been delayed for a great while; at length they break in irreſiſtibly, like an armed force: repentance is too late to relieve, and can ſerve only to aggravate, their diſtreſs: The caſe is become deſperate: and poverty and ſickneſs, remorſe and anguiſh, infamy and death, the effects of their own doings, overwhelm them, beyond poſſibility of remedy or eſcape. This is an account of what is in fact the general conſtitution of nature.

13 IT is not in any ſort meant, that according to what appears at preſent of the natural courſe of things, men are always uniformly puniſhed in proportion to their miſbehaviour: But that there are very many inſtances of miſbehaviour puniſhed in the ſeveral ways now mentioned, and very dreadful inſtances too; ſufficient to ſhow what the laws of the univerſe may admit; and, if thoroughly conſidered, ſufficient fully to anſwer all objections againſt the credibility of a future ſtate of puniſhments, from any imaginations, that the frailty of our nature and external temptations, almoſt annihilate the guilt of human vices: as well as objections of another ſort; from neceſſity; from ſuppoſitions, that the will of an infinite Being cannot be contradicted, or that he muſt be incapable of offence and provocation*.

* See Ch. iv. and Ch. vi.

REFLECTIONS of this kind are not without their terrors to ſerious perſons, the moſt free from enthuſiaſm, and of the greateſt ſtrength of mind: But it is fit things be ſtated and conſidered as they really are. And there is, in the preſent age, a certain fearleſſneſs, with regard to what may be hereafter under the Government of God, which, nothing but an univerſally acknowledged demonſtration on the ſide of atheiſm, can juſtify; and which makes it quite neceſſary, that men be reminded, and if poſſible made to feel, that there is no ſort of ground for being thus preſumptuous, even upon the moſt ſceptical principles. For, may it not be ſaid of any perſon upon his being born into the world, he may behave ſo, as to be of no ſervice to it, but by being made an example of the woful effects of vice and folly? That he may, as any one may, if he will, incur an infamous execution, from the hands of civil juſtice; or in ſome other courſe of extravagance ſhorten his days: or bring upon himſelf infamy and diſeaſes worſe than death? So that it had been better for him, even with regard to the preſent world, that he had never been born. And is there any pretence of reaſon, for people to think themſelves ſecure, and talk as if they had certain proof, that let them act as licentiouſly as they will, there can be nothing analogous to this, with regard to a future and more general intereſt, under the providence and government of the ſame God.

PART I.

CHAP. III.

Of the Moral Government of God.

1 AS the manifold appearances of deſign, and of final cauſes, in the conſtitution of the world, prove it to be the work of an intelligent Mind; ſo the particular final cauſes of pleaſure and pain diſtributed amongſt his creatures, prove that they are under his government; what may be called his natural government of creatures endued with ſenſe and reaſon. This, however, implies ſomewhat more than ſeems uſually attended to, when we ſpeak of God's natural government of the world. It implies government of the very ſame kind with that, which a maſter exerciſes over his ſervants, or a civil magiſtrate over his ſubjects. These latter inſtances of final cauſes, as really prove an intelligent *Governor* of the world, in the ſenſe now mentioned, and before † diſtinctly treated of; as any other inſtances of final cauſes prove an intelligent *Maker* of it.

2 BUT this alone does not appear at firſt ſight to determine any thing certainly, concerning the moral character of the Author of Nature, conſidered in this relation of Governor; does not aſcertain his government to be moral, or prove that he is the righteous judge of the world. Moral government

† Chap. ii.

conſiſts, not barely in rewarding and puniſhing men for their actions, which the moſt tyrannical perſon may do: but in rewarding the righteous and puniſhing the wicked; in rendering to men according to their actions, conſidered as good or evil. And the perfection of moral government conſiſts in doing this, with regard to all intelligent creatures, in an exact proportion to their perſonal merits or demerits.

SOME men ſeem to think the only character of the Author of Nature to be That of ſimple abſolute benevolence. This conſidered as a principle of action and infinite in degree, is a diſpoſition to produce the greateſt poſſible happineſs, without regard to perſons behaviour, otherwiſe than as ſuch regard would produce higher degrees of it. And ſuppoſing this to be the only character of God, veracity and juſtice in Him, would be nothing but benevolence conducted by wiſdom. Now ſurely this ought not to be aſſerted, unleſs it can be proved; for we ſhould ſpeak with cautious reverence upon ſuch a ſubject. And whether it can be proved or no, is not the thing here to be enquired into; but whether in the conſtitution and conduct of the world, a righteous government be not diſcernibly planned out: which neceſſarily implies a righteous Governor. There may poſſibly be in the creation beings, to whom the Author of Nature manifeſts himſelf under this moſt amiable of all characters, this of infinite abſolute benevolence; for it is the moſt amiable, ſuppoſing it not, as perhaps it is not, incompatible with juſtice: but he manifeſts Himſelf to us under the character of a righteous Governor. He may, conſiſtently

with this, be ſimply and abſolutely benevolent, in the ſenſe now explained: But He is, for he has given us a proof in the conſtitution and conduct of the world that He is, a Governor over ſervants, as He rewards and puniſhes us for our actions. And in the conſtitution and conduct of it, he may alſo have given, beſides the reaſon of the thing, and the natural preſages of conſcience, clear and diſtinct intimations, that His Government is righteous or moral: clear to ſuch as think the nature of it deſerving their attention; and yet not to every careleſs perſon, who caſts a tranſient reflection upon the ſubject. *

4 But it is particularly to be obſerved, that the Divine government, which we experience ourſelves under in the preſent ſtate, taken alone, is allowed not to be the perfection of moral government. And yet this by no means hinders, but that there may be ſomewhat, be it more or leſs, truly moral in it. A righteous government may plainly appear to be carried on to ſome degree: enough to give us the apprehenſion that it ſhall be compleated, or carried on to that degree of perfection which religion teaches us it ſhall; but which cannot appear, till much more of the Divine adminiſtration be ſeen, than can in

* The objections againſt religion, from the evidence of it not being univerſal, nor ſo ſtrong as might poſſibly have been, may be urged againſt natural religion, as well as againſt revealed. And therefore the conſideration of them belongs to the firſt Part of this treatiſe, as well as the ſecond. But as theſe objections are chiefly urged againſt revealed religion, I choſe to conſider them in the ſecond Part. And the anſwer to them there, Ch. vi, as urged againſt Chriſtianity, being almoſt equally applicable to them as urged againſt the religion

the preſent life. And the deſign of this chapter is to enquire, how far this is the caſe: how far, over and above the moral nature † which God has given us, and our natural notion of him as righteous Governor of thoſe his creatures, to whom he has given this nature ‡; I ſay how far beſides this, the principles and beginnings of a moral government over the world may be diſcerned, notwithſtanding and amidſt all the confuſion and diſorder of it.

Now one might mention here, what has been often urged with great force, that in general, leſs uneaſineſs and more ſatisfaction, are the natural conſequences * of a virtuous than of a vitious courſe of life, in the preſent ſtate, as an inſtance of a moral government eſtabliſhed in nature; an inſtance of it, collected from experience and preſent matter of fact. But it muſt be owned a thing of difficulty to weigh and ballance pleaſures and uneaſineſſes, each amongſt themſelves, and alſo againſt each other, ſo as to make an eſtimate with any exactneſs, of the overplus of happineſs on the ſide of virtue. And it is not impoſſible, that, amidſt the infinite diſorders of the world, there may be exceptions to the happineſs of virtue; even with regard to thoſe perſons, whoſe courſe of life from their youth up, has been blameleſs; and more with regard to thoſe, who have gone on for ſome time in the ways of vice, and have afterwards reformed. For ſuppoſe an inſtance of the latter caſe; a perſon with his paſſions inflamed, his

of nature; to avoid repetition, the reader is referred to that chapter.

† Diſſertation 2. ‡ Ch. vi.

* See Lord Shafteſbury's inquiry concerning virtue, Part II.

natural faculty of ſelf-government impaired by habits of indulgence, and with all his vices about him, like ſo many harpies, craving for their accuſtomed gratification: who can ſay how long it might be, before ſuch a perſon would find more ſatisfaction in the reaſonableneſs and preſent good conſequences of virtue, than difficulties and ſelf-denial in the reſtraints of it? Experience alſo ſhows, that men can, to a great degree, get over their ſenſe of ſhame, ſo as that by profeſſing themſelves to be without principle, and avowing even direct villany, they can ſupport themſelves againſt the infamy of it. But as the ill actions of any one will probably be more talked of, and oftener thrown in his way, upon his reformation; ſo the infamy of them will be much more felt, after the natural ſenſe of virtue and of honour is recovered. Uneaſineſſes of this kind ought indeed to be put to the account of former vices: yet it will be ſaid, they are in part the conſequences of reformation. Still I am far from allowing it doubtful, whether virtue, upon the whole, be happier than vice in the preſent world. But if it were, yet the beginnings of a righteous adminiſtration may beyond all queſtion be found in nature, if we will attentively inquire after them. And,

I. IN whatever manner the notion of God's moral Government over the world might be treated, if it did not appear, whether He were in a proper ſenſe our Governor at all: yet when it is certain matter of experience, that He does manifeſt himſelf to us under the character of a Governor, in the ſenſe

explained *; it must deserve to be considered, whether there be not reason to apprehend, that He may be a righteous or moral Governor. Since it appears to be fact, that God does govern mankind by the method of rewards and punishments, according to some settled rules of distribution; it is surely a question to be asked, What presumption is there against his finally rewarding and punishing them, according to this particular rule, namely, as they act reasonably or unreasonably, virtuously or vitiously? Since rendering men happy or miserable by this rule, certainly falls in, much more falls in, with our natural apprehensions and sense of things, than doing so by any other rule whatever: Since rewarding and punishing actions by any other rule, would appear much harder to be accounted for, by minds formed as He has formed ours. Be the evidence of religion then more or less clear, the expectation which it raises in us, that the righteous shall, upon the whole, be happy, and the wicked miserable, cannot however possibly be considered as absurd or chimerical; because it is no more than an expectation, that a method of government already begun, shall be carried on, the method of rewarding and punishing actions; and shall be carried on by a particular rule, which unavoidably appears to us at first sight more natural than any other, the rule which we call distributive justice. Nor,

II. OUGHT it to be entirely passed over, that tranquillity, satisfaction, and external advantages, being the natural consequences of prudent manage-

* Ch. ii.

ment of ourſelves, and our affairs; and raſhneſs, profligate negligence, and willful folly, bringing after them many inconveniences and ſufferings; theſe afford inſtances of a right conſtitution of nature: as the correction of children, for their own ſakes, and by way of example, when they run into danger or hurt themſelves, is a part of right education. And thus, that God governs the world by general fixt laws, that He has endued us with capacities of reflection upon this conſtitution of things, and foreſeeing the good and bad conſequences of our behaviour; plainly implies ſome ſort of Moral Government; ſince from ſuch a conſtitution of things it cannot but follow, that prudence and imprudence, which are of the nature of virtue and vice, * muſt be, as they are, reſpectively rewarded and puniſhed.

III. FROM the natural courſe of things, vitious actions are, to a great degree, actually puniſhed as miſchievous to ſociety: And beſides puniſhment actually inflicted upon this account, there is alſo the fear and apprehenſion of it in thoſe perſons, whoſe crimes have rendered them obnoxious to it, in caſe of a diſcovery; this ſtate of fear being itſelf often a very conſiderable puniſhment. The natural fear and apprehenſion of it too, which reſtrains from ſuch crimes, is a declaration of nature againſt them. It is neceſſary to the very being of ſociety, that vices deſtructive of it, ſhould be puniſhed *as being ſo*; the vices of falſhood, injuſtice, cruelty: Which puniſhment therefore is as natural as ſociety; and

* See diſſertation II.

ſo is an inſtance of a kind of moral Government, naturally eſtabliſhed and actually taking place. And, ſince the certain natural courſe of things, is the conduct of Providence or the Government of God, though carried on by the inſtrumentality of men; the obſervation here made amounts to this, that mankind find themſelves placed by Him in ſuch circumſtances, as that they are unavoidably accountable for their behaviour, and are often puniſhed, and ſometimes rewarded under His Government, in the view of their being miſchievous, or eminently beneficial to ſociety.

IF it be objected that good actions, and ſuch as are beneficial to ſociety, are often puniſhed, as in the caſe of perſecution and in other caſes; and that ill and miſchievous actions are often rewarded: it may be anſwered diſtinctly; firſt, that this is in no ſort neceſſary, and conſequently not natural, in the ſenſe in which it is neceſſary, and therefore natural, that ill or miſchievous actions ſhould be puniſhed: And in the next place, that good actions are never puniſhed, conſidered as beneficial to ſociety, nor ill actions rewarded, under the view of their being hurtful to it. So that it ſtands good, without any thing on the ſide of vice to be ſet over-againſt it, that the Author of nature has as truly directed, that vitious actions conſidered as miſchievous to ſociety, ſhould be puniſhed, and put mankind under a neceſſity of thus puniſhing them; as he has directed and neceſſitated us to preſerve our lives by food.

IV. IN the natural courſe of things, virtue *as ſuch* is actually rewarded, and vice *as ſuch* puniſh-

ed: which ſeems to afford an inſtance or example, not only of government, but of moral government, begun and eſtabliſhed; moral in the ſtricteſt ſenſe; though not in that perfection of degree, which religion teaches us to expect. In order to ſee this more clearly, we muſt diſtinguiſh between actions themſelves, and that quality aſcribed to them, which we call virtuous or vitious. The gratification itſelf of every natural paſſion, muſt be attended with delight: And acquiſitions of fortune, however made, are acquiſitions of the means, or materials, of enjoyment. An action then, by which any natural paſſion is gratified or fortune acquired, procures delight or advantage; abſtracted from all conſideration of the morality of ſuch action. Conſequently the pleaſure or advantage in this caſe, is gained by the action itſelf, not by the morality, the virtuouſneſs or vitiouſneſs of it; though it be, perhaps, virtuous or vitious. Thus, to ſay ſuch an action or courſe of behaviour, procured ſuch pleaſure or advantage, or brought on ſuch inconvenience and pain, is quite a different thing from ſaying, that ſuch good or bad effect was owing to the virtue or vice of ſuch action or behaviour. In one caſe, an action abſtracted from all moral conſideration, produced its effect: In the other caſe, for it will appear that there are ſuch caſes, the morality of the action, the action under a moral conſideration, *i. e.* the virtuouſneſs or vitiouſneſs of it, produced the effect. Now I ſay virtue as ſuch, naturally procures conſiderable advantages to the virtuous, and vice as ſuch, naturally occaſions great inconvenience and even miſery to the vitious, in very many inſtances.

The immediate effects of virtue and vice upon the mind and temper, are to be mentioned as inſtances of it. Vice as ſuch is naturally attended with ſome ſort of uneaſineſs, and, not uncommonly, with great diſturbance and apprehenſion. That inward feeling, which, reſpecting leſſer matters, and in familiar ſpeech, we call being vexed with oneſelf, and, in matters of importance and in more ſerious language, remorſe; is an uneaſineſs naturally ariſing from an action of a man's own, reflected upon by himſelf as wrong, unreaſonable, faulty, *i. e.* vitious in greater or leſs degrees: And this manifeſtly is a different feeling from that uneaſineſs, which ariſes from a ſenſe of mere loſs or harm. What is more common, than to hear a man lamenting an accident or event, and adding——but however he has the ſatisfaction that he cannot blame himſelf for it; or on the contrary, that he has the uneaſineſs of being ſenſible it was his own doing? Thus alſo the diſturbance and fear, which often follow upon a man's having done an injury, ariſe from a ſenſe of his being blame-worthy; otherwiſe there would, in many caſes, be no ground of diſturbance, nor any reaſon to fear reſentment or ſhame. On the other hand, inward ſecurity and peace, and a mind open to the ſeveral gratifications of life, are the natural attendants of innocence and virtue. To which muſt be added the complacency, ſatisfaction, and even joy of heart, which accompany the exerciſe, the real exerciſe, of gratitude, friendſhip, benevolence.

// AND here, I think, ought to be mentioned, the fears of future puniſhment, and peaceful hopes

of a better life, in thoſe who fully believe, or have any ſerious apprehenſion of religion: becauſe theſe hopes and fears are preſent uneaſineſs and ſatisfaction to the mind; and cannot be got rid of by great part of the world, even by men who have thought moſt thoroughly upon that ſubject of religion; And no one can ſay, how conſiderable this uneaſineſs and ſatisfaction may be, or what upon the whole it may amount to.

12 IN the next place comes in the conſideration, that all honeſt and good men are diſpoſed to befriend honeſt good men as ſuch, and to diſcountenance the vicious as ſuch, and do ſo in ſome degree; indeed in a conſiderable degree: from which favour and diſcouragement cannot but ariſe conſiderable advantage and inconvenience. And though the generality of the world have little regard to the morality of their own actions, and may be ſuppoſed to have leſs to that of others, when they themſelves are not concerned; yet let any one be known to be a man of virtue, ſome how or other, he will be favoured, and good offices will be done him, from regard to his character without remote views, occaſionally, and in ſome low degree, I think, by the generality of the world, as it happens to come in their way. Public honours too and advantages are the natural conſequences, are ſometimes at leaſt the conſequences in fact, of virtuous actions; of eminent juſtice, fidelity, charity, love to our country, conſidered in the view of being virtuous. And ſometimes even death itſelf, often infamy, and external inconveniences, are the public conſequences of vice as vice. For

inſtance, the ſenſe which mankind have of tyranny, injuſtice, oppreſſion, additional to the mere feeling or fear of miſery, has doubtleſs been inſtrumental in bringing about revolutions, which make a figure even in the hiſtory of the world. For it is plain, men reſent injuries as implying faultineſs, and retaliate, not merely under the notion of having received harm, but of having received wrong; and they have this reſentment in behalf of others, as well as of themſelves. So likewiſe even the generality are, in ſome degree, grateful and diſpoſed to return good offices, not merely becauſe ſuch an one has been the occaſion of good to them, but under the view, that ſuch good offices implied kind intention and good deſert in the doer. To all this may be added two or three particular things, which, many perſons will think frivolous; but to me nothing appears ſo, which at all comes in towards determining a queſtion of ſuch importance, as, whether there be, or be not, a moral inſtitution of government, in the ſtricteſt ſenſe moral, *viſibly* eſtabliſhed and begun in Nature. The particular things are theſe: That in domeſtic government, which is doubtleſs natural, children and others alſo are very generally puniſhed, for falſhood and injuſtice and ill-behaviour, as ſuch, and rewarded for the contrary; which are inſtances where veracity, and juſtice, and right behaviour as ſuch, are naturally inforced by rewards and puniſhments, whether more or leſs conſiderable in degree: That, though civil government be ſuppoſed to take cognizance of actions in no other view than as prejudicial to ſociety, without reſpect to the immorality

of them; yet as ſuch actions are immoral, ſo the ſenſe which men have of the immorality of them, very greatly contributes, in different ways, to bring offenders to juſtice: And that intire abſence of all crime and guilt in the moral ſenſe, when plainly appearing, will almoſt of courſe procure, and circumſtances of aggravated guilt prevent, a remiſſion of the penalties annexed to civil crimes, in many caſes, though by no means in all.

UPON the whole then, beſides the good and bad effects of virtue and vice upon men's own minds, the courſe of the world does, in ſome meaſure, turn upon the approbation and diſapprobation of them as ſuch, in others. The ſenſe of well and ill doing, the preſages of conſcience, the love of good characters and diſlike of bad ones, honour, ſhame, reſentment, gratitude; all theſe, conſidered in themſelves, and in their effects, do afford manifeſt real inſtances of virtue as ſuch naturally favoured, and of vice as ſuch diſcountenanced, more or leſs, in the daily courſe of human life; in every age, in every relation, in every general circumſtance of it. That God has given us a moral nature *, may moſt juſtly be urged as a proof of our being under His moral government: But that he has placed us in a condition, which gives this nature, as one may ſpeak, ſcope to operate, and in which it does unavoidably operate; *i. e.* influence mankind to act, ſo as thus to favour and reward virtue, and diſcountenance and puniſh vice; this is not the ſame, but a further, additional proof of His moral government: for it is an inſtance

* See Diſſertation II.

of it. The firſt is a proof, that he will finally favour and ſupport virtue effectually: The ſecond is an example of his favouring and ſupporting it at preſent, in ſome degree.

14 IF a more diſtinct inquiry be made, whence it ariſes, that virtue as ſuch is often rewarded, and vice as ſuch is puniſhed, and this rule never inverted: it will be found to proceed, in part, immediately from the moral nature itſelf, which God has given us; and alſo in part, from his having given us, together with this nature, ſo great a power over each other's happineſs and miſery. For *firſt*, it is certain, that peace and delight, in ſome degree, and upon ſome occaſions, is the neceſſary and preſent effect of virtuous practice; an effect ariſing immediately from that conſtitution of our nature. We are ſo made, that well-doing as ſuch gives us ſatisfaction, at leaſt, in ſome inſtances; ill-doing as ſuch, in none. And *ſecondly*, from our moral nature, joined with God's having put our happineſs and miſery in many reſpects in each other's power, it cannot but be, that vice, as ſuch, ſome kinds and inſtances of it at leaſt, will be infamous, and men will be diſpoſed to puniſh it as in itſelf deteſtable; and the villain will by no means be able always to avoid feeling that infamy, any more than he will be able to eſcape this further puniſhment, which mankind will be diſpoſed to inflict upon him, under the notion of his deſerving it. But there can be nothing on the ſide of vice, to anſwer this; becauſe there is nothing in the human mind, contradictory, as the Logicians ſpeak, to virtue. For virtue conſiſts in a regard to what is right

and reaſonable, as being ſo; in a regard to veracity, juſtice, charity, in themſelves: and there is ſurely no ſuch thing, as a like natural regard to falſhood, injuſtice, cruelty. If it be thought, that there are inſtances of an approbation of vice, as ſuch, in itſelf, and for its own ſake, (though it does not appear to me, that there is any ſuch thing at all; but ſuppoſing there be,) it is evidently monſtrous: as much ſo, as the moſt acknowledged perverſion of any paſſion whatever. Such inſtances of perverſion then being left out, as merely imaginary, or, however, unnatural; it muſt follow, from the frame of our nature, and from our condition, in the reſpects now deſcribed, that vice cannot at all be, and virtue cannot but be, favoured as ſuch by others, upon ſome occaſions; and happy in itſelf, in ſome degree. For what is here inſiſted upon, is not the degree in which virtue and vice are thus diſtinguiſhed, but only the thing itſelf, that they are ſo in ſome degree; though the whole good and bad effect of virtue and vice as ſuch, is not inconſiderable in degree. But that they muſt be thus diſtinguiſhed in ſome degree, is in a manner neceſſary: it is matter of fact of daily experience, even in the greateſt confuſion of human affairs.

15 IT is not pretended, but that in the natural courſe of things, happineſs and miſery appear to be diſtributed by other rules, than only the perſonal merit and demerit of characters. They may ſometimes be diſtributed by way of mere diſcipline. There may be the wiſeſt and beſt reaſons, why the world ſhould be governed by general laws, from whence ſuch pro-

miſcuous diſtribution perhaps muſt follow; and alſo why our happineſs and miſery ſhould be put in each other's power, in the degree which they are. And theſe things, as in general they contribute to the rewarding virtue and puniſhing vice, as ſuch: ſo they often contribute alſo, not to the inverſion of this, which is impoſſible; but to the rendering perſons proſperous, though wicked; afflicted, though righteous; and, which is worſe, to the *rewarding ſome actions*, though vicious; and *puniſhing other actions*, though virtuous. But all this cannot drown the voice of nature in the conduct of providence, plainly declaring itſelf for virtue, by way of diſtinction from vice, and preference to it. For, our being ſo conſtituted, as that virtue and vice are thus naturally favoured and diſcountenanced, rewarded and puniſhed reſpectively as ſuch, is an intuitive proof of the intent of Nature, that it ſhould be ſo: otherwiſe the conſtitution of our mind, from which it thus immediately and directly proceeds, would be abſurd. But it cannot be ſaid, becauſe virtuous actions, are ſometimes puniſhed, and vitious actions rewarded, that Nature intended it. For, though this great diſorder is brought about, as all actions are done, by means of ſome natural paſſion; yet *this may be*, as it undoubtedly is, brought about by the perverſion of ſuch paſſion, implanted in us for other, and thoſe very good purpoſes. And indeed theſe other and good purpoſes, even of every paſſion, may be clearly ſeen.

WE have then a declaration, in ſome degree of preſent effect, from Him who is ſupreme in Nature,

which ſide He is of, or what part He takes: a declaration for virtue, and againſt vice. So far therefore as a man is true to virtue, to veracity and juſtice, to equity and charity, and the right of the caſe, in whatever he is concerned; ſo far he is on the ſide of the Divine adminiſtration, and co-operates with it: and from hence, to ſuch a man, ariſes naturally a ſecret ſatisfaction, and ſenſe of ſecurity, and implicit hope of ſomewhat further. And,

17 V. THIS hope is confirmed by the neceſſary tendencies of virtue, which, though not of preſent effect, yet are at preſent diſcernable in nature; and ſo afford an inſtance of ſomewhat moral in the eſſential conſtitution of it. There is, in the nature of things, a tendency in virtue and vice to produce the good and bad effects now mentioned, in a greater degree than they do in fact produce them. For inſtance; good and bad men would be much more rewarded and puniſhed as ſuch, were it not, that juſtice is often artificially eluded, that characters are not known, and many, who would thus favour virtue and diſcourage vice are hindered from doing ſo by accidental cauſes. Theſe tendencies of virtue and vice are obvious with regard to *individuals*. But it may require more particularly to be conſidered, that power in a *ſociety*, by being under the direction of virtue, naturally increaſes, and has a neceſſary tendency to prevail over oppoſite power, not under the direction of it; in like manner as power, by being under the direction of reaſon, increaſes, and has a tendency to prevail over brute force.

There are ſeveral brute creatures of equal, and ſeveral of ſuperior ſtrength, to that of men; and poſſibly the ſum of the whole ſtrength of brutes, may be greater than that of mankind: But reaſon gives us the advantage and ſuperiority over them; and thus man is the acknowledged governing animal upon the earth. Nor is this ſuperiority conſidered by any as accidental; but as what reaſon has a tendency, in the nature of the thing, to obtain. And yet perhaps difficulties may be raiſed about the meaning, as well as the truth, of the aſſertion, that virtue has the like tendency.

To obviate theſe difficulties, let us ſee more diſtinctly, how the caſe ſtands with regard to reaſon; which is ſo readily acknowledged to have this advantageous tendency. Suppoſe then two or three men, of the beſt and moſt improved underſtanding, in a deſolate open plain, attacked by ten times the number of beaſts of prey: Would their reaſon ſecure them the victory in this unequal combat? Power then, though joined with reaſon, and under its direction, cannot be expected to prevail over oppoſite power, though merely brutal, unleſs the one bears ſome proportion to the other. Again: Put the imaginary caſe, that rational and irrational creatures were of like external ſhape and manner: it is certain, before there were opportunities for the firſt to diſtinguiſh each other, to ſeparate from their adverſaries, and to form an union among themſelves, they might be upon a level, or in ſeveral reſpects upon great diſadvantage; though united they might be vaſtly ſuperior: Since union is of ſuch efficacy,

that ten men united, might be able to accompliſh, what ten thouſand of the ſame natural ſtrength and underſtanding wholly ununited, could not. In this caſe then, brute force might more than maintain its ground againſt reaſon, for want of union among the rational creatures. Or ſuppoſe a number of men to land upon an iſland inhabited only by wild beaſts; a number of men, who, by the regulations of civil government, the inventions of art, and the experience of ſome years, could they be preſerved ſo long, would be really ſufficient, to ſubdue the wild beaſts, and to preſerve themſelves in ſecurity from them: Yet a conjuncture of accidents might give ſuch advantage to the irrational animals, as that they might at once overpower, and even extirpate, the whole ſpecies of rational ones. Length of time then, proper ſcope and opportunities, for reaſon to exert itſelf, may be abſolutely neceſſary to its prevailing over brute force. Further ſtill: There are many inſtances of brutes ſucceeding in attempts, which they could not have undertaken, had not their irrational nature rendered them incapable of foreſeeing the danger of ſuch attempts, or the fury of paſſion hindred their attending to it; and there are inſtances of reaſon and real prudence preventing men's undertaking what, it hath appeared afterwards, they might have ſucceeded in by a lucky raſhneſs. And in certain conjunctures, ignorance and folly, weakneſs and diſcord, may have their advantages. So that rational animals have not neceſſarily the ſuperiority over irrational ones: but, how improbable ſoever it may be, it is evidently poſſible, that, in ſome globes, the latter may be

ſuperior. And were the former wholly at variance and diſunited, by falſe ſelf-intereſt and envy, by treachery and injuſtice, and conſequent rage and malice againſt each other, whilſt the latter were firmly united among themſelves by inſtinct; this might greatly contribute to the introducing ſuch an inverted order of things. For every one would conſider it as inverted: Since reaſon has, in the nature of it, a tendency to prevail over brute force; notwithſtanding the poſſibility it may not prevail, and the neceſſity, which there is, of many concurring circumſtances to render it prevalent.

Now I ſay, virtue in a ſociety has a like tendency to procure ſuperiority and additional power: whether this power be conſidered as the means of ſecurity from oppoſite power, or of obtaining other advantages. And it has this tendency, by rendring public good, an object and end, to every member of the ſociety; by putting every one upon conſideration and diligence, recollection and ſelf-government, both in order to ſee what is the moſt effectual method, and alſo in order to perform their proper part, for obtaining and preſerving it; by uniting a ſociety within itſelf, and ſo increaſing its ſtrength; and, which is particularly to be mentioned, uniting it by means of veracity and juſtice. For as theſe laſt are principal bonds of union, ſo benevolence or public ſpirit, undirected, unreſtrained by them, is, no body knows what.

And ſuppoſe the inviſible world, and the inviſible diſpenſations of providence, to be, in any ſort, ana-

logous to what appears: or that both together make up one uniform ſcheme, the two parts of which, the part which we ſee, and that which is beyond our obſervation, are analogous to each other: Then, there muſt be a like natural tendency in the derived power, throughout the univerſe, under the direction of virtue, to prevail in general over that, which is not under its direction; as there is in reaſon, derived reaſon in the univerſe, to prevail over brute force. But then, in order to the prevalence of virtue, or that it may actually produce, what it has a tendency to produce; the like concurrences are neceſſary, as are, to the prevalence of reaſon. There muſt be ſome proportion, between the natural power or force which is, and that which is not, under the direction of virtue: There muſt be ſufficient length of time; for the compleat ſucceſs of virtue, as of reaſon, cannot, from the nature of the thing, be otherwiſe than gradual: There muſt be, as one may ſpeak, a fair field of trial, a ſtage large and extenſive enough, proper occaſions and opportunities, for the virtuous to join together, to exert themſelves againſt lawleſs force, and to reap the fruit of their united labours. Now indeed it is to be hoped, that the diſproportion between the good and bad, even here on earth, is not ſo great, but that the former have natural power ſufficient to their prevailing to a conſiderable degree, if circumſtances would permit this power to be united. For, much leſs, very much leſs, power under the direction of virtue, would prevail over much greater not under the direction of it. However, good men over the face of the earth cannot unite; as for other reaſons, ſo becauſe they

cannot be ſufficiently aſcertained of each others characters. And the known courſe of human things, the ſcene we are now paſſing through, particularly the ſhortneſs of life, denies to virtue its full ſcope in ſeveral other reſpects. The natural tendency, which we have been conſidering, though real, is *hindred* from being carried into effect in the preſent ſtate: But theſe hindrances may be removed in a future one. Virtue, to borrow the chriſtian alluſion, is militant here; and various untoward accidents contribute to its being often overborne: But it may combat with greater advantage hereafter, and prevail compleatly, and enjoy its conſequent rewards, in ſome future ſtates. Neglected as it is, perhaps unknown, perhaps deſpiſed and oppreſſed, here; there may be ſcenes in eternity, laſting enough, and in every other way adapted, to afford it a ſufficient ſphere of action; and a ſufficient ſphere for the natural conſequences of it to follow in fact. If the ſoul be naturally immortal, and this ſtate be a progreſs towards a future one, as childhood is towards mature age; good men may naturally unite, not only amongſt themſelves, but alſo with other orders of virtuous creatures, in that future ſtate. For virtue, from the very nature of it, is a principle and bond of union, in ſome degree, amongſt all who are endued with it, and known to each other; ſo as that by it, a good man cannot but recommend himſelf to the favour and protection of all virtuous beings, throughout the whole univerſe, who can be acquainted with his character, and can any way interpoſe in his behalf in any part of his duration. And one might add, that ſuppoſe all this advantage-

ous tendency of virtue to become effect, amongſt one or more orders of creatures, in any diſtant ſcenes and periods, and to be ſeen by any orders of vicious creatures, throughout the univerſal Kingdom of God; this happy effect of virtue, would have a tendency, by way of example, and poſſibly in other ways, to amend thoſe of them, who are capable of amendment, and being recovered to a juſt ſenſe of virtue. If our notions of the plan of providence were enlarged, in any ſort proportionable to what late diſcoveries have enlarged our views with reſpect to the material world; repreſentations of this kind would not appear abſurd or extravagant. However they are not to be taken, as intended for a literal delineation of what is in fact the particular ſcheme of the univerſe, which cannot be known without revelation: for ſuppoſitions are not to be looked on as true, becauſe not incredible: But they are mentioned to ſhew, that our finding virtue to be hindred from procuring to itſelf ſuch ſuperiority and advantages, is no objection againſt its having, in the eſſential nature of the thing, a tendency to procure them. And the ſuppoſitions now mentioned do plainly ſhew this: For they ſhew, that theſe hindrances are ſo far from being neceſſary, that we ourſelves can eaſily conceive, how they may be removed in future ſtates, and full ſcope be granted to virtue. And all theſe advantageous tendencies of it, are to be conſidered as declarations of God in its favour. This however is taking a pretty large compaſs: though it is certain, that, as the material world appears to be, in a manner, boundleſs and immenſe;

there muſt be *ſome* ſcheme of providence, vaſt in proportion to it.

BUT let us return to the earth our habitation; and we ſhall ſee this happy tendency of virtue, by imagining an inſtance not ſo vaſt and remote: by ſuppoſing a kingdom or ſociety of men upon it, perfectly virtuous, for a ſucceſſion of many ages; to which, if you pleaſe, may be given a ſituation advantageous for univerſal monarchy. In ſuch a ſtate, there would be no ſuch thing as faction: but men of the greateſt capacity would of courſe, all along, have the chief direction of affairs willingly yielded to them; and they would ſhare it among themſelves without envy. Each of theſe would have the part aſſigned him, to which his genius was peculiarly adapted: and others, who had not any diſtinguiſhed genius, would be ſafe, and think themſelves very happy, by being under the protection and guidance of thoſe who had. Public determinations would really be the reſult of the united wiſdom of the community: and they would faithfully be executed, by the united ſtrength of it. Some would in a higher way contribute, but all would in ſome way contribute, to the public proſperity: and in it, each would enjoy the fruits of his own virtue. And as injuſtice, whether by fraud or force, would be unknown among themſelves; ſo they would be ſufficiently ſecured from it in their neighbours. For cunning and falſe ſelf-intereſt, confederacies in injuſtice, ever ſlight, and accompanied with faction and inteſtine treachery;

theſe on one hand would be found mere childiſh folly and weakneſs, when ſet in oppoſition againſt wiſdom, public ſpirit, union inviolable, and fidelity on the other: allowing both a ſufficient length of years to try their force. Add the general influence, which ſuch a kingdom would have over the face of the earth, by way of example particularly, and the reverence which would be paid it. It would plainly be ſuperior to all others, and the world muſt gradually come under its empire: not by means of lawleſs violence; but partly by what muſt be allowed to be juſt conqueſt; and partly by other kingdoms ſubmitting themſelves voluntarily to it, throughout a courſe of ages, and claiming its protection, one after another, in ſucceſſive exigencies. The head of it would be an univerſal monarch, in another ſenſe than any mortal has yet been; and the eaſtern ſtile would be literally applicable to him, that *all people, nations, and languages ſhould ſerve him.* And though indeed our knowledge of human nature, and the whole hiſtory of mankind, ſhew the impoſſibility, without ſome miraculous interpoſition, that a number of men, here on earth, ſhould unite in one ſociety or government, in the fear of God and univerſal practice of virtue: and that ſuch a government ſhould continue ſo united for a ſucceſſion of ages: yet admitting or ſuppoſing this, the effect would be as now drawn out. And thus, for inſtance, the wonderful power and proſperity promiſed to the Jewiſh nation in the ſcripture, would be, in a great meaſure, the conſequence of what is predicted of them; that the *people ſhould be all righteous and inherit the*

land for ever *; were we to understand the latter phrase of a long continuance only, sufficient to give things time to work. The predictions of this kind, for there are many of them, cannot come to pass, in the present known course of nature; but suppose them come to pass, and then, the dominion and pre-eminence promised must naturally follow, to a very considerable degree.

22 CONSIDER now, the general system of religion: that the government of the world is uniform, and one, and moral; that virtue and right shall finally have the advantage, and prevail over fraud and lawless force, over the deceits as well as the violence of wickedness, under the conduct of one supreme Governor: And from the observations above made, it will appear, that God has, by our reason, given us to see a peculiar connection in the several parts of this scheme, and a tendency towards the completion of it arising out of the very nature of virtue: which tendency is to be considered as somewhat moral in the essential constitution of things. If any one should think all this to be of little importance; I desire him to consider, what he would think, if vice had, essentially, and in its nature, these advantageous tendencies; or if virtue had essentially the direct contrary ones.

23 BUT it may be objected, that, notwithstanding all these natural effects and these natural tendencies of virtue; yet things may be now going on throughout the universe, and may go on hereafter, in the

* Isa. lx. 21.

ſame mixt way as here at preſent upon earth: Virtue ſometimes proſperous, ſometimes depreſſed; vice ſometimes puniſhed, ſometimes ſucceſsful. The anſwer to which is, that it is not the purpoſe of this chapter, nor of this treatiſe, properly to prove God's perfect moral government over the world, or the truth of religion; but to obſerve what there is in the conſtitution and courſe of nature, to confirm the proper proof of it, ſuppoſed to be known: And that the weight of the foregoing obſervations to this purpoſe, may be thus diſtinctly proved. Pleaſure and pain are indeed to a certain degree, ſay to a very high degree, diſtributed amongſt us without any apparent regard to the merit or demerit of characters. And were there nothing elſe, concerning this matter, diſcernible in the conſtitution and courſe of nature; there would be no ground from the conſtitution and courſe of nature, to hope or to fear, that men would be rewarded or puniſhed hereafter according to their deſerts: which however, it is to be remarked, implies, that even then there would be no ground from appearances to think, that vice upon the whole would have the advantage, rather than that virtue would. And thus the proof of a future ſtate of retribution, would reſt upon the uſual known arguments for it: which are I think plainly unanſwerable; and would be ſo, though there were no additional confirmation of them from the things above inſiſted on. But theſe things are a very ſtrong confirmation of them. For,

24 *Firſt*, THEY ſhew, that the Author of Nature is not indifferent to virtue and vice. They amount to a declaration from Him, determinate and not to be

evaded, in favour of one, and againſt the other: ſuch a declaration, as there is nothing to be ſet over-againſt or anſwer, on the part of vice. So that were a man, laying aſide the proper proof of religion, to determine from the courſe of nature only, whether it were moſt probable, that the righteous or the wicked, would have the advantage in a future life; there can be no doubt, but that he would determine the probability to be, that the former would. The courſe of nature then, in the view of it now given, furniſhes us with a real practical proof of the obligations of religion.

Secondly, WHEN, conformably to what religion teaches us, God ſhall reward and puniſh virtue and vice as ſuch, ſo as that every one ſhall, upon the whole, have his deſerts; this diſtributive juſtice will not be a thing different in *kind*, but only in *degree*, from what we experience in His preſent government. It will be that in *effect*, toward which we now ſee a *tendency*. It will be no more than the *completion* of that moral government, the *principles and beginning* of which, have been ſhewn, beyond all diſpute, diſcernible in the preſent conſtitution and courſe of nature. And from hence it follows,

Thirdly, THAT, as under the natural government of God, our experience of thoſe kinds and degrees of happineſs and miſery, which we do experience at preſent, gives juſt ground to hope for and to fear, higher degrees, and other kinds of both in a future ſtate, ſuppoſing a future ſtate admitted: ſo

under his moral government, our experience, that virtue and vice are, in the manners above-mentioned, actually rewarded and puniſhed at preſent, in a certain degree, gives juſt ground to hope and to fear, that they *may be* rewarded and puniſhed in an higher degree hereafter. It is acknowledged indeed, that this alone is not ſufficient ground to think, that they *actually will be* rewarded and puniſhed in a higher degree, rather than in a lower: But then,

27 *Laſtly*, THERE is ſufficient ground to think ſo, from the good and bad tendencies of virtue and vice. For theſe tendencies are eſſential, and founded in the nature of things; whereas the hindrances to their becoming effect, are, in numberleſs caſes, not neceſſary, but artificial only. Now it may be much more ſtrongly argued, that theſe tendencies, as well as the actual rewards and puniſhments, of virtue and vice, which ariſe directly out of the nature of things, will remain hereafter, than that the accidental hindrances of them will. And if theſe hindrances do not remain; thoſe rewards and puniſhments cannot but be carried on much further towards the perfection of moral government: *i. e.* the tendencies of virtue and vice will become effect: But when, or where, or in what particular way, cannot be known at all, but by revelation.

28 UPON the whole: There is a kind of moral government implied in God's natural government: * virtue and vice are naturally rewarded and pu-

* Pag. 59, 60.

niſhed as beneficial and miſchievous to ſociety; * and rewarded and puniſhed directly as virtue and vice.† The notion then of a moral ſcheme of government, is not fictitious, but natural; for it is ſuggeſted to our thoughts by the conſtitution and courſe of nature: and the execution of this ſcheme is actually begun, in the inſtances here mentioned. And theſe things are to be conſidered, as a declaration of the Author of Nature, for virtue, and againſt vice: They give a credibility to the ſuppoſition of their being rewarded and puniſhed hereafter; and alſo ground to hope and to fear, that they may be rewarded and puniſhed in higher degrees than they are here. And as all this is confirmed, ſo the argument for religion, from the conſtitution and courſe of nature, is carried on farther, by obſerving, that there are natural tendencies, and, in innumerable caſes, only artificial hindrances, to this moral ſcheme's being carried on much farther towards perfection than it is at preſent‡. The notion then of a moral ſcheme of government, much more perfect than what is ſeen, is not a fictitious, but a natural notion: for it is ſuggeſted to our thoughts, by the eſſential tendencies of virtue and vice. And theſe tendencies are to be conſidered as intimations, as implicit promiſes and threatnings, from the Author of Nature, of much greater rewards and puniſhments to follow virtue and vice, than do at preſent. And indeed, every *natural* tendency, which is to continue, but which is hindred from becoming effect by only *accidental* cauſes, affords a preſumpti-

* Pag. 60. † Pag. 61, 62. ‡ Pag. 70, &c.

on, that ſuch tendency will, ſome time or other, become effect: a preſumption in degree proportionable to the length of the duration, through which ſuch tendency will continue. And from theſe things together, ariſes a real preſumption, that the moral ſcheme of government eſtabliſhed in nature, ſhall be carried on much farther towards perfection hereafter; and, I think, a preſumption that it will be abſolutely compleated. But from theſe things, joined with the moral nature of which God has given us, conſidered as given us by Him, ariſes a practical proof* that it will be compleated: a proof from fact; and therefore a diſtinct one from that, which is deduced from the eternal and unalterable relations, the fitneſs and unfitneſs of actions.

* See this proof drawn out briefly, Ch. vi.

PART I.

CHAP. IV.

Of a ſtate of Probation, as implying Trial, Difficulties and Danger.

THE general doctrine of religion, that our preſent life is a ſtate of probation for a future one, comprehends under it ſeveral particular things, diſtinct from each other. But the firſt, and moſt common meaning of it, ſeems to be, that our future intereſt is now depending, and depending upon ourſelves; that we have ſcope and opportunities here, for that good and bad behaviour, which God will reward and puniſh hereafter; together with temptations to one, as well as inducements of reaſon to the other. And this is, in great meaſure, the ſame with ſaying, that we are under the moral government of God, and to give an account of our actions to Him. For the notion of a future account and general righteous judgment, implies ſome ſort of temptations to what is wrong: otherwiſe there would be no moral poſſibility of doing wrong, nor ground for judgment, or diſcrimination. But there is this difference, that the word *probation* is more diſtinctly and particularly expreſſive of allurements to wrong, or difficulties in adhering uniformly to what is right, and of the danger of miſcarrying by ſuch temptations, than the words *moral government*. A ſtate of probation then, as thus particularly implying in it trial, diffi-

culties and danger, may require to be conſidered diſtinctly by itſelf.

AND as the moral government of God, which religion teaches us, implies, that we are in a ſtate of trial with regard to a future world: ſo alſo his natural government over us, implies, that we are in a ſtate of trial, in the like ſenſe, with regard to the preſent world. Natural government by rewards and puniſhments, as much implies natural trial, as moral government does moral trial. The natural government of God here meant*, conſiſts, in his annexing pleaſure to ſome actions, and pain to others, which are in our power to do or forbear, and in giving us notice of ſuch appointment beforehand. This neceſſarily implies, that he has made our happineſs and miſery, or our intereſt, to depend in part upon our ſelves. And ſo far as men have temptations to any courſe of action, which will probably occaſion them greater temporal inconvenience and uneaſineſs, than ſatisfaction; ſo far their temporal intereſt is in danger from themſelves, or they are in a ſtate of trial with reſpect to it. Now people often blame others, and even themſelves, for their miſconduct in their temporal concerns. And we find many are greatly wanting to themſelves, and miſs of that natural happineſs, which they might have obtained in the preſent life: perhaps every one does in ſome degree. But many run themſelves into great inconvenience, and into extreme diſtreſs and miſery: not through incapacity of knowing better, and doing better for themſelves,

* Chap. ii.

which would be nothing to the preſent purpoſe; but through their own fault. And theſe things neceſſarily imply temptation, and danger of miſcarrying, in a greater or leſs degree, with reſpect to our worldly intereſt or happineſs. Every one too, without having religion in his thoughts, ſpeaks of the hazards which young people run, upon their ſetting out in the world: Hazards from other cauſes, than merely their ignorance, and unavoidable accidents. And ſome courſes of vice, at leaſt, being contrary to men's worldly intereſt or good; temptations to theſe, muſt at the ſame time be temptations to forego our preſent, and our future intereſt. Thus in our natural or temporal capacity, we are in a ſtate of trial, *i. e.* of difficulty and danger, analogous, or like to our moral and religious trial.

THIS will more diſtinctly appear to any one, who thinks it worth while, more diſtinctly, to conſider, what it is which conſtitutes our trial in both capacities, and to obſerve, how mankind behave under it.

AND that which conſtitutes this our trial, in both theſe capacities, muſt be ſomewhat either in our external circumſtances, or in our nature. For, on the one hand, perſons may be betrayed into wrong behaviour upon ſurprize, or overcome upon any other very ſingular and extraordinary external occaſions; who would, otherwiſe, have preſerved their character of prudence and of virtue: in which caſes, every one, in ſpeaking of the wrong behaviour of

theſe perſons, would impute it to ſuch particular external circumſtances. And on the other hand, men who have contracted habits of vice and folly of any kind, or have ſome particular paſſions in exceſs, will ſeek opportunities, and, as it were, go out of their way, to gratify themſelves in theſe reſpects, at the expence of their wiſdom and their virtue; led to it, as every one would ſay, not by external temptations, but by ſuch habits and paſſions. And the account of this laſt caſe is, that particular paſſions are no more coincident with prudence, or that reaſonable ſelf-love, the end of which is our worldly intereſt, than they are with the principle of virtue and religion; but often draw contrary ways to one, as well as to the other: and ſo ſuch particular paſſions are as much temptations, to act imprudently with regard to our worldly intereſt, as to act vitiouſly*. However, as when we ſay, men are miſled by external circumſtances of temptation; it cannot but be underſtood, that there is ſomewhat within themſelves, to render thoſe circumſtances temptations, or to render them ſuſceptible of impreſſions from them: So when we ſay, they are miſled by paſſions; it is always ſuppoſed, that there are occaſions, circumſtances, and objects, exciting theſe paſſions, and affording means for gratifying them. And therefore, temptations from within, and from without, coincide, and mutually imply each other. Now the ſeveral external objects of the appetites, paſſions, and affections, being pre-

* See ſermons preached at the *Rolls*, 1726. 2d. Ed. p. 205, &c. Pref. p. 25, &c. Serm. p. 21, &c.

ſent to the ſenſes, or offering themſelves to the mind, and ſo exciting emotions ſuitable to their nature; not only in caſes where they can be gratified conſiſtently with Innocence and prudence, but alſo in caſes where they cannot, and yet can be gratified imprudently and vitiouſly: this as really puts them in danger of voluntarily foregoing their preſent intereſt or good, as their future; and as really renders ſelf-denial neceſſary to ſecure one, as the other: *i. e.* We are in a like ſtate of trial with reſpect to both, by the very ſame paſſions, excited by the very ſame means. Thus mankind having a temporal intereſt depending upon themſelves, and a prudent courſe of behaviour being neceſſary to ſecure it; paſſions inordinately excited, whether by means of example, or by any other external circumſtance, towards ſuch objects, at ſuch times, or in ſuch degrees, as that they cannot be gratified conſiſtently with worldly prudence; are temptations, dangerous, and too often ſucceſsful temptations, to forego a greater temporal good for a leſs; *i. e.* to forego what is, upon the whole, our temporal intereſt, for the ſake of a preſent gratification. This is a deſcription of our ſtate of trial in our temporal capacity. Subſtitute now the word *future* for *temporal*, and *virtue* for *prudence*; and it will be juſt as proper a deſcription of our ſtate of trial in our religious capacity: ſo analogous are they to each other.

IF, from conſideration of this our like ſtate of trial in both capacities, we go on to obſerve farther, how mankind behave under it; we ſhall find there

are ſome, who have ſo little ſenſe of it, that they ſcarce look beyond the paſſing day: They are ſo taken up with preſent gratifications, as to have, in a manner, no feeling of conſequences, no regard to their future eaſe or fortune in this life; any more than to their happineſs in another. Some appear to be blinded and deceived by inordinate paſſion, in their worldly concerns, as much as in religion. Others are, not deceived, but, as it were, forcibly carried away by the like paſſions, againſt their better judgment, and feeble reſolutions too of acting better. And there are men, and truly they are not a few, who ſhameleſly avow, not their intereſt, but their mere will and pleaſure, to be their law of life: and who, in open defiance of every thing that is reaſonable, will go on in a courſe of vitious extravagance, foreſeeing, with no remorſe, and little fear, that it will be their temporal ruin; and ſome of them, under the apprehenſion of the conſequences of wickedneſs in another ſtate. And to ſpeak in the moſt moderate way, human creatures are not only continually liable to go wrong voluntarily, but we ſee likewiſe that they often actually do ſo, with reſpect to their temporal intereſts, as well as with reſpect to religion.

THUS our difficulties and dangers, or our trials, in our temporal and our religious capacity, as they proceed from the ſame cauſes, and have the ſame effect upon men's behaviour, are evidently analogous, and of the ſame kind.

IT may be added, that as the difficulties and dangers of miſcarrying in our religious ſtate of trial,

are greatly increaſed, and one is ready to think, in a manner wholly *made*, by the ill behaviour of others; by a wrong education, wrong in a moral ſenſe, ſometimes poſitively vitious; by general bad example; by the diſhoneſt artifices, which are got into buſineſſes of all kinds; and, in very many parts of the world, by religion's being corrupted into ſuperſtitions, which indulge men in their vices: So in like manner, the difficulties of conducting ourſelves prudently in reſpect to our preſent intereſt, and our danger of being led aſide from purſuing it, are greatly increaſed, by a fooliſh education; and, after we come to mature age, by the extravagance and careleſſneſs of others, whom we have intercourſe with; and by miſtaken notions, very generally prevalent, and taken up for common opinion, concerning temporal happineſs, and wherein it conſiſts. And perſons, by their own negligence and folly in their temporal affairs, no leſs than by a courſe of vice, bring themſelves into new difficulties; and, by habits of indulgence, become leſs qualified to go through them: And one irregularity after another, embarraſſes things to ſuch a degree, that they know not where about they are; and often makes the path of conduct ſo intricate and perplexed, that it is difficult to trace it out; difficult even to determine what is the prudent or the moral part. Thus, for inſtance, wrong behaviour in one ſtage of life, youth; wrong, I mean, conſidering ourſelves only in our temporal capacity, without taking in religion; this, in ſeveral ways, increaſes the difficulties of right behaviour in mature age; *i. e.* puts us into a more diſadvantageous ſtate of trial in our temporal capacity.

WE are an inferior part of the creation of God. There are natural appearances of our being in a ſtate of degradation *. And we certainly are in a condition, which *does not ſeem*, by any means, the moſt advantageous we could imagine or deſire, either in our natural or moral capacity, for ſecuring either our preſent or future intereſt. However, this condition, low and careful and uncertain as it is, does not afford any juſt ground of complaint. For, as men may manage their temporal affairs with prudence, and ſo paſs their days here on earth in tolerable eaſe and ſatisfaction, by a moderate degree of care: ſo likewiſe with regard to religion, there is no more required than what they are well able to do, and what they muſt be greatly wanting to themſelves, if they neglect. And for perſons to have that put upon them, which they are well able to go through, and no more, we naturally conſider as an equitable thing; ſuppoſing it done by proper authority. Nor have we any more reaſon to complain of it, with regard to the Author of Nature, than of his not having given us other advantages, belonging to other orders of creatures.

BUT the thing here inſiſted upon is, that the ſtate of trial which religion teaches us we are in, is rendered credible, by its being throughout uniform and of a piece with the general conduct of providence towards us, in all other reſpects within the compaſs of our knowledge. Indeed if mankind, conſidered in their natural capacity, as inhabitants of this world only, found themſelves, from their birth to their death, in a ſettled ſtate of ſecurity and happineſs,

* Part II. Chap. v.

without any ſolicitude or thought of their own: or if they were in no danger of being brought into inconveniences and diſtreſs, by careleſsneſs, or the folly of paſſion, through bad example, the treachery of others, or the deceitful appearances of things: Were this our natural condition; then it might ſeem ſtrange, and be ſome preſumption againſt the truth of religion, that it repreſents our future and more general intereſt, as not ſecure of courſe, but as depending upon our behaviour, and requiring recollection and ſelf-government to obtain it. For it might be alledged, "What you ſay is our conditi-"on in one reſpect, is not in any ways of a ſort "with what we find, by experience, our condition "is in another. Our whole preſent intereſt is ſe-"cured to our hands, without any ſolicitude of "ours; and why ſhould not our future intereſt, "if we have any ſuch, be ſo too?" But ſince, on the contrary, thought and conſideration, the voluntary denying ourſelves many things which we deſire, and a courſe of behaviour, far from being always agreeable to us; are abſolutely neceſſary to our acting even a common decent, and common prudent part, ſo as to paſs with any ſatisfaction through the preſent world, and be received upon any tolerable good terms in it: ſince this is the caſe, all preſumption againſt ſelf-denial and attention being neceſſary to ſecure our higher intereſt, is removed. Had we not experience, it might, perhaps ſpecioufly, be urged, that it is improbable any thing of hazard and danger ſhould be put upon us by an Infinite Being; when every thing which is hazard and danger in our manner of conception, and will end

in error, confuſion, and miſery, is now already certain in his fore-knowledge. And indeed, why any thing of hazard and danger ſhould be put upon ſuch frail creatures as we are, may well be thought a difficulty in ſpeculation; and cannot but be ſo, till we know the whole, or, however, much more of the caſe. But ſtill the conſtitution of nature is as it is. Our happineſs and miſery are truſted to our conduct, and made to depend upon it. Somewhat, and, in many circumſtances, a great deal too, is put upon us, either to do, or to ſuffer, as we chuſe. And all the various miſeries of life, which people bring upon themſelves by negligence and folly, and might have avoided by proper care, are inſtances of this: Which miſeries are beforehand, juſt as contingent and undetermined as their conduct, and left to be determined by it.

THESE obſervations are an anſwer to the objections againſt the credibility of a ſtate of trial, as implying temptations, and real danger of miſcarrying with regard to our general intereſt, under the moral Government of God: and they ſhew, that, if we are at all to be conſidered in ſuch a capacity, and as having ſuch an intereſt; the general analogy of providence muſt lead us to apprehend ourſelves in danger of miſcarrying, in different degrees, as to this intereſt, by our neglecting to act the proper part belonging to us in that capacity. For we have a preſent intereſt, under the Government of God which we experience here upon earth. And this intereſt, as it is not forced upon us, ſo neither is it offered to our acceptance, but to our acquiſi-

tion; in ſuch ſort, as that we are in danger of miſſing it, by means of temptations to neglect, or act contrary to it; and without attention and ſelf-denial, muſt and do miſs of it. It is then perfectly credible, that this may be our caſe, with reſpect to that chief and final good, which religion propoſes to us.

PART I.

CHAP. V.

Of a ſtate of Probation, as intended for moral Diſcipline and Improvement.

FROM the conſideration of our being in a probation-ſtate, of ſo much difficulty and hazard, naturally ariſeth the queſtion, how we came to be placed in it. But ſuch a general inquiry as this, would be found involved in inſuperable difficulties. For, though ſome of theſe difficulties would be leſſened by obſerving, that all wickedneſs is voluntary, as is implied in its very notion; and that many of the miſeries of life have apparent good effects: yet, when we conſider other circumſtances belonging to both, and what muſt be the conſequence of the former in a life to come; it cannot but be acknowledged plain folly and preſumption, to pretend to give an account of the whole reaſons of this matter: the whole reaſons of our being allotted a condition, out of which ſo much wickedneſs and miſery, ſo circumſtanced, would in fact ariſe. Whether it be not beyond our faculties, not only to find out, but even to underſtand, the whole account of this; or, though we ſhould be ſuppoſed capable of underſtanding it, yet, whether it would be of ſervice or prejudice to us to be informed of it; is impoſſible to ſay. But as our preſent condition can in no wiſe be ſhewn inconſiſtent with the perfect moral government of

God: ſo religion teaches us we were placed in it, that we might qualify ourſelves, by the practice of virtue, for another ſtate which is to follow it. And this, though but a partial anſwer, a very partial one indeed, to the inquiry now mentioned; yet, is a more ſatisfactory anſwer to another, which is of real, and of the utmoſt importance to us to have anſwered: the inquiry, What is our buſineſs here? The known end then, why we are placed in a ſtate of ſo much affliction, hazard, and difficulty, is, our improvement in virtue and piety, as the requiſite qualification for a future ſtate of ſecurity and happineſs.

2

Now the beginning of life, conſidered as an education for mature age in the preſent world, appears plainly, at firſt ſight, analogous to this our trial for a future one: the former being in our temporal capacity, what the latter is in our religious capacity. But ſome obſervations common to both of them, and a more diſtinct conſideration of each, will more diſtinctly ſhew the extent and force of the analogy between them; and the credibility, which ariſes from hence, as well as from the nature of the thing, that the preſent life was intended to be a ſtate of diſcipline for a future one.

3

I. EVERY ſpecies of creatures is, we ſee, deſigned for a particular way of life; to which, the nature, the capacities, temper, and qualifications, of each ſpecies, are as neceſſary, as their external circumſtances. Both come into the notion of ſuch ſtate, or particular way of life, and are conſtituent

parts of it. Change a man's capacities or character to the degree, in which it is conceivable they may be changed; and he would be altogether incapable of a human courſe of life, and human happineſs: as incapable, as if, his nature continuing unchanged, he were placed in a world, where he had no ſphere of action, nor any objects to anſwer his appetites, paſſions, and affections of any ſort. One thing is ſet over-againſt another, as an antient writer expreſſes it. Our nature correſponds to our external condition. Without this correſpondence, there would be no poſſibility of any ſuch thing as human life and human happineſs: which life and happineſs are, therefore, a *reſult* from our nature and condition jointly: meaning by human life, not living in the literal ſenſe, but the whole complex notion commonly underſtood by thoſe words. So that, without determining what will be the employment and happineſs, the particular life of good men hereafter; there muſt be ſome determinate capacities, ſome neceſſary character and qualifications, without which perſons cannot but be utterly uncapable of it: in like manner, as there muſt be ſome, without which men would be incapable of their preſent ſtate of life. Now,

II. THE conſtitution of human creatures, and indeed of all creatures which come under our notice, is ſuch, as that they are capable of naturally becoming qualified for ſtates of life, for which they were once wholly unqualified. In imagination we may indeed conceive of creatures, as incapable of having any of their faculties naturally enlarged, or

as being unable naturally to acquire any new qualifications: But the faculties of every ſpecies known to us, are made for enlargement; for acquirements of experience and habits. We find ourſelves in particular indued with capacities, not only of perceiving ideas, and of knowledge or perceiving truth, but alſo of ſtoring up our ideas and knowledge by memory. We are capable, not only of acting, and of having different momentary impreſſions made upon us; but of getting a new facility in any kind of action, and of ſettled alterations in our temper or character. The power of the two laſt is the power of habits. But neither the perception of ideas, nor knowledge of any ſort, are habits; though abſolutely neceſſary to the forming of them. However, apprehenſion, reaſon, memory, which are the capacities of acquiring knowledge, are greatly improved by exerciſe. Whether the word habit is applicable to all theſe improvements, and in particular how far the powers of memory and of habits may be powers of the ſame nature, I ſhall not inquire. But that perceptions come into our minds readily and of courſe, by means of their having been there before, ſeems a thing of the ſame ſort, as readineſs in any particular kind of action, proceeding from being accuſtomed to it. And aptneſs to recollect practical obſervations of ſervice in our conduct, is plainly habit in many caſes. There are habits of perception, and habits of action. An inſtance of the former, is our conſtant, and even involuntary readineſs, in correcting the impreſſions of our ſight concerning magnitudes and diſtances, ſo as to ſubſtitute judgment in the room of ſenſation imper-

ceptibly to ourſelves. And it ſeems as if all other aſſociations of ideas not naturally connected, might be called paſſive habits; as properly as our readineſs in underſtanding languages, upon ſight or hearing of words. And our readineſs in ſpeaking and writing them is an inſtance of the latter, of active habits. For diſtinctneſs, we may conſider habits, as belonging to the body, or the mind: and the latter will be explained by the former. Under the former are comprehended all bodily activities or motions whether graceful or unbecoming, which are owing to uſe: Under the latter, general habits of life and conduct; ſuch as thoſe of obedience and ſubmiſſion to authority, or to any particular perſon; thoſe of veracity, juſtice, and charity; thoſe of attention, induſtry, ſelf-government, envy, revenge. And habits of this latter kind ſeem produced by repeated acts, as well as the former. And in like manner as habits belonging to the body are produced by external acts: ſo habits of the mind are produced by the exertion of inward practical principles, *i. e.* by carrying them into act, or acting upon them; the principles of obedience, of veracity, juſtice, and charity. Nor can thoſe habits be formed by any external courſe of action, otherwiſe than as it proceeds from theſe principles: becauſe it is only theſe inward principles exerted, which are ſtrictly acts of obedience, of veracity, of juſtice, and of charity. So likewiſe habits of attention, induſtry, ſelf-government, are in the ſame manner acquired by exerciſe; and habits of envy and revenge by indulgence, whether in outward act, or in thought and intention, *i. e.* inward act: for ſuch intention is an act. Reſolutions alſo to

do well, are properly acts. And endeavouring to enforce upon our own minds, a practical ſenſe of virtue, or to beget in others that practical ſenſe of it, which a man really has himſelf, is a virtuous act. All theſe, therefore, may and will contribute towards forming good habits. But going over the theory of virtue in one's thoughts, talking well, and drawing fine pictures, of it; this is ſo far from neceſſarily or certainly conducing to form an habit of it, in him who thus employs himſelf; that it may harden the mind in a contrary courſe, and render it gradually more inſenſible, *i. e.* form an habit of inſenſibility, to all moral conſiderations. For, from our very faculty of habits, paſſive impreſſions, by being repeated, grow weaker. Thoughts, by often paſſing through the mind, are felt leſs ſenſibly: Being accuſtomed to danger, begets intrepidity, *i. e.* leſſens fear; to diſtreſs, leſſens the paſſion of pity; to inſtances of others mortality, leſſens the ſenſible apprehenſion of our own. And from theſe two obſervations together; That practical habits are formed and ſtrengthened by repeated acts, and that paſſive impreſſions grow weaker by being repeated upon us; it muſt follow, that active habits may be gradually forming and ſtrengthening, by a courſe of acting upon ſuch and ſuch motives and excitements, whilſt theſe motives and excitements themſelves are, by proportionable degrees, growing leſs ſenſible, *i. e.* are continually leſs and leſs ſenſibly felt, even as the active habits ſtrengthen. And experience confirms this: For active principles, at the very time that they are leſs lively in perception than they were, are found to be, ſome how, wrought more thoroughly into the

temper and character, and become more effectual in influencing our practice. The three things just mentioned may afford instances of it. Perception of danger, is a natural excitement of passive fear, and active caution: And by being inured to danger, habits of the latter are gradually wrought, at the same time that the former gradually lessens. Perception of distress in others, is a natural excitement, passively to pity, and actively to relieve it: But let a man set himself to attend to, inquire out, and relieve distressed persons, and he cannot but grow less and less sensibly affected with the various miseries of life, with which he must become acquainted; when yet, at the same time, benevolence, considered not as a passion, but as a practical principle of action, will strengthen: and whilst he passively compassionates the distressed less, he will acquire a greater aptitude actively to assist and befriend them. So also at the same time that the daily instances of mens dying around us, give us daily a less sensible passive feeling or apprehension of our own mortality, such instances greatly contribute to the strengthening a practical regard to it in serious men; *i. e.* to forming an habit of acting with a constant view to it. And this seems again further to shew, that passive impressions made upon our minds by admonition, experience, example, though they may have a remote efficacy, and a very great one, towards forming active habits, yet, can have this efficacy no otherwise than by inducing us to such a course of action: and that it is, not being affected so and so, but acting, which forms those habits: Only it must be always remembered, that real en-

deavours to enforce good impreſſions upon ourſelves, are a ſpecies of virtuous action. Nor do we know how far it is poſſible, in the nature of things, that effects ſhould be wrought in us at once, equivalent to habits, *i. e.* what is wrought by uſe and exerciſe. However, the thing inſiſted upon is, not what may be poſſible, but what is in fact the appointment of Nature: which is, that active habits are to be formed by exerciſe. Their progreſs may be ſo gradual, as to be imperceptible of its ſteps: It may be hard to explain the faculty, by which we are capable of habits, throughout its ſeveral parts; and to trace it up to its original, ſo as to diſtinguiſh it from all others in our mind: And it ſeems as if contrary effects were to be aſcribed to it. But the thing in general, that our nature is formed to yield, in ſome ſuch manner as this, to uſe and exerciſe; is matter of certain experience.

THUS, by accuſtoming ourſelves to any courſe of action, we get an aptneſs to go on, a facility, readineſs, and often pleaſure, in it. The inclinations which rendered us averſe to it, grow weaker: the difficulties in it, not only the imaginary but the real ones, leſſen: the reaſons for it, offer themſelves of courſe to our thoughts upon all occaſions: and the leaſt glimpſe of them is ſufficient to make us go on, in a courſe of action, to which we have been accuſtomed. And practical principles appear to grow ſtronger, abſolutely in themſelves, by exerciſe; as well as relatively, with regard to contrary principles; which, by being accuſtomed to ſubmit

do ſo habitually, and of courſe. And thus a new character, in ſeveral reſpects, may be formed; and many habitudes of life, not given by Nature, but which Nature directs us to acquire.

6 III. INDEED we may be aſſured, that we ſhould never have had theſe capacities of improving by experience, acquired knowledge, and habits, had they not been neceſſary, and intended to be made uſe of. And accordingly we find them ſo neceſſary, and ſo much intended, that without them we ſhould be utterly incapable of that, which was the end for which we were made, conſidered in our temporal capacity only: the employments and ſatisfactions of our mature ſtate of life.

7 NATURE does in no wiſe qualify us wholly, much leſs at once, for this mature ſtate of life. Even maturity of underſtanding and bodily ſtrength, are not only arrived to gradually, but are alſo very much owing to the continued exerciſe of our powers of body and mind, from infancy. But if we ſuppoſe a perſon brought into the world with both theſe in maturity, as far as this is conceivable; he would plainly at firſt be as unqualified for the human life of mature age, as an idiot. He would be in a manner diſtracted, with aſtoniſhment, and apprehenſion, and curioſity, and ſuſpenſe: Nor can one gueſs, how long it would be, before he would be familiarized to himſelf and the objects about him enough, even to ſet himſelf to any thing. It may be queſtioned too, whether the natural information of his ſight and hearing, would be of any

manner of uſe at all to him in acting, before experience. And it ſeems, that men would be ſtrangely headſtrong and ſelf-willed, and diſpoſed to exert themſelves with an impetuoſity, which would render ſociety inſupportable, and the living in it impracticable; were it not for ſome acquired moderation and ſelf-government, ſome aptitude and readineſs in reſtraining themſelves, and concealing their ſenſe of things. Want of every thing of this kind which is learnt, would render a man as uncapable of ſociety, as want of language would: or as his natural ignorance of any of the particular employments of life, would render him uncapable of providing himſelf with the common conveniences, or ſupplying the neceſſary wants of it. In theſe reſpects, and probably in many more, of which we have no particular notion, mankind is left, by nature, an unformed, unfiniſhed creature; utterly deficient and unqualified, before the acquirement of knowledge, experience, and habits, for that mature ſtate of life, which was the end of his creation, conſidering him as related only to this world.

BUT then, as Nature has endued us with a power of ſupplying thoſe deficiencies, by acquired knowledge, experience, and habits: ſo likewiſe we are placed in a condition, in infancy, childhood, and youth, fitted for it; fitted for our acquiring thoſe qualifications of all ſorts, which we ſtand in need of in mature age. Hence children, from their very birth, are daily growing acquainted, with the objects about them, with the ſcene in which they are placed, and to have a future part; and learning

ſomewhat or other, neceſſary to the performance of it. The ſubordinations, to which they are accuſtomed in domeſtic life, teach them ſelf-government in common behaviour abroad, and prepare them for ſubjection and obedience to civil authority. What paſſes before their eyes, and daily happens to them, gives them experience, caution againſt treachery and deceit, together with numberleſs little rules of action and conduct, which we could not live without; and which are learnt ſo inſenſibly and ſo perfectly, as to be miſtaken perhaps for inſtinct: though they are the effect of long experience and exerciſe; as much ſo as language, or knowledge in particular buſineſs, or the qualifications and behaviour belonging to the ſeveral ranks and profeſſions. Thus the beginning of our days is adapted to be and is, a ſtate of education in the theory and practice of mature life. We are much aſſiſted in it by example, inſtruction, and the care of others; but a great deal is left to ourſelves to do. And of this, as part is done eaſily and of courſe; ſo part requires diligence and care, the voluntary foregoing many things which we deſire, and ſetting ourſelves to what we ſhould have no inclination to, but for the neceſſity or expedience of it. For, That labour and induſtry, which the ſtation of ſo many abſolutely requires, they would be greatly unqualified for, in maturity; as thoſe in other ſtations would be, for any other ſorts of application; if both were not accuſtomed to them in their youth. And according as perſons behave themſelves, in the general education which all go through, and in the particular ones adapted to particular employments; their character is formed,

and made appear; they recommend themſelves more or leſs; and are capable of, and placed in, different ſtations in the ſociety of mankind.

THE former part of life then, is to be conſidered as an important opportunity, which Nature puts into our hands; and which, when loſt, is not to be recovered. And our being placed in a ſtate of diſcipline throughout this life, for another world, is a providential diſpoſition of things, exactly of the ſame kind, as our being placed in a ſtate of diſcipline during childhood, for mature age. Our condition in both reſpects is uniform and of a piece, and comprehended under one and the ſame general law of nature.

AND if we were not able at all to diſcern, how or in what way the preſent life could be our preparation for another; this would be no objection againſt the credibility of its being ſo. For we do not diſcern, how food and ſleep contribute to the growth of the body: nor could have any thought that they would, before we had experience. Nor do children at all think, on the one hand, that the ſports and exerciſes, to which they are ſo much addicted, contribute to their health and growth; nor on the other, of the neceſſity which there is for their being reſtrained in them: Nor are they capable of underſtanding the uſe of many parts of diſcipline, which nevertheleſs they muſt be made to go through, in order to qualify them for the buſineſs of mature age. Were we not able then to diſcover, in what reſpects the preſent life could form us for a future one: yet nothing would be more ſuppoſeable than

that it might, in ſome reſpects or other, from the general analogy of providence. And this, for aught I ſee, might reaſonably be ſaid, even though we ſhould not take in the conſideration of God's moral government over the world. But,

11 IV. TAKE in this conſideration, and conſequently, that the character of virtue and piety is a neceſſary qualification for the future ſtate; and then we may diſtinctly ſee, how, and in what reſpects the preſent life may be a preparation for it: ſince we *want, and are capable of, improvement in that character, by moral and religious habits;* and *the preſent life is fit to be a ſtate of diſcipline for ſuch improvement*: In like manner as we have already obſerved, how, and in what reſpects, infancy, childhood, and youth, are a neceſſary preparation, and a natural ſtate of diſcipline, for mature age.

12 NOTHING which we at preſent ſee, would lead us to the thought of a ſolitary unactive ſtate hereafter: but, if we judge at all from the analogy of nature, we muſt ſuppoſe, according to the ſcripture account of it, that it will be a community. And there is no ſhadow of any thing unreaſonable in conceiving, though there be no analogy for it, that this community will be, as the ſcripture repreſents it, under the more immediate, or, if ſuch an expreſſion may be uſed, the more ſenſible government of God. Nor is our ignorance, what will be the employments of this happy community, nor our conſequent ignorance, what particular ſcope or occaſion there will be for the exerciſe of veracity, juſtice, and charity,

amongſt the members of it with regard to each other; any proof, that there will be no ſphere of exerciſe for thoſe virtues. Much leſs, if that were poſſible, is our ignorance any proof, that there will be no occaſion for that frame of mind, or character which is formed by the daily practice of thoſe particular virtues here, and which is a reſult from it. This at leaſt muſt be owned in general, that, as the government eſtabliſhed in the univerſe is moral, the character of virtue and piety muſt, in ſome way or other, be the condition of our happineſs, or the qualification for it.

Now from what is above obſerved, concerning our natural power of habits, it is eaſy to ſee, that we are *capable* of moral improvement by diſcipline. And how greatly we *want* it, need not be proved to any one who is acquainted with the great wickedneſs of mankind; or even with thoſe imperfections, which the beſt are conſcious of. But it is not perhaps diſtinctly attended to by every one, that the occaſion which human creatures have for diſcipline, to improve in them this character of virtue and piety, is to be traced up higher than to exceſs in the paſſions, by indulgence and habits of vice. Mankind, and perhaps all finite creatures, from the very conſtitution of their nature, before habits of virtue, are deficient, and in danger of deviating from what is right: and therefore ſtand in need of virtuous habits, for a ſecurity againſt this danger. For, together with the general principle of moral underſtanding, we have in our inward frame various affections towards particular external objects. Theſe

affections are naturally, and of right, ſubject to the government of the moral principle, as to the occaſions upon which they may be gratified; as to the times, degrees, and manner, in which the objects of them may be purſued: But then the principle of virtue can neither excite them, nor prevent their being excited. On the contrary, they are naturally felt, when the objects of them are preſent to the mind, not only before all conſideration, whether they can be obtained by lawful means, but after it is found they cannot. For the natural objects of affection continue ſo; the neceſſaries, conveniences, and pleaſures of life, remain naturally deſirable; though they cannot be obtained innocently: nay, though they cannot poſſibly be obtained at all. And when the objects of any affection whatever cannot be obtained without unlawful means; but may be obtained by them: ſuch affection, though its being excited, and its continuing ſome time in the mind, be as innocent as it is natural and neceſſary; yet cannot but be conceived to have a tendency to incline perſons to venture upon ſuch unlawful means: and therefore muſt be conceived as putting them in ſome danger of it. Now what is the general ſecurity againſt this danger, againſt their actually deviating from right? As the danger is, ſo alſo muſt the ſecurity be, from within: from the practical principle of virtue *. And the ſtrengthening or improving this

* It may be thought, that ſenſe of intereſt would as effectually reſtrain creatures from doing wrong. But if by a *ſenſe of intereſt* is meant a ſpeculative conviction or belief, that ſuch and ſuch indulgence would occaſion them greater uneaſineſs, upon the whole, than ſatisfaction; it is contrary to preſent experience to ſay, that this ſenſe

principle, conſidered as practical, or as a principle of action, will leſſen the danger, or increaſe the ſecurity againſt it. And this moral principle is capable of improvement, by proper diſcipline and exerciſe: by recollecting the practical impreſſions which example and experience have made upon us: and, inſtead of following humour and mere inclination, by continually attending to the equity and right of the caſe, in whatever we are engaged, be it in greater or leſs matters; and accuſtoming ourſelves always to act upon it; as being itſelf the juſt and natural motive of action: and as this moral courſe of behaviour, muſt neceſſarily, under Divine government, be our final intereſt. *Thus the principle of virtue, improved into an habit, of which improvement we are thus capable, will plainly be, in proportion to the ſtrength of it, a ſecurity againſt the danger which finite creatures are in, from the very nature of propenſion, or particular affections.* This way of putting the matter, ſuppoſes particular affections to remain

of intereſt is ſufficient to reſtrain them from thus indulging themſelves. And if by a *ſenſe of intereſt* is meant, a practical regard to what is upon the whole our happineſs: this is not only coincident with the principle of virtue or moral rectitude, but is a part of the idea itſelf. And it is evident this reaſonable ſelf-love wants to be improved as really as any principle in our nature. For we daily ſee it overmatched, not only by the more boiſterous paſſions, but by curioſity, ſhame, love of imitation, by any thing, even indolence; eſpecially if the intereſt, the temporal intereſt, ſuppoſe, which is the end of ſuch ſelf-love, be at a diſtance. So greatly are profligate men miſtaken, when they affirm they are wholly governed by intereſtedneſs and ſelf-love. And ſo little cauſe is there for moraliſts to diſclaim this principle. See p. 87, 88.

in a future ſtate; which it is ſcarce poſſible to avoid ſuppoſing. And if they do; we clearly ſee, that acquired habits of virtue and ſelf-government may be neceſſary for the regulation of them. However, though we were not diſtinctly to take in this ſuppoſition, but to ſpeak only in general; the thing really comes to the ſame. For habits of virtue, thus acquired by diſcipline, are improvement in virtue: and improvement in virtue, muſt be advancement in happineſs, if the government of the univerſe be moral.

FROM theſe things we may obſerve, and it will farther ſhew this our natural and original need of being improved by diſcipline, how it comes to paſs, that creatures made upright fall; and that thoſe who preſerve their uprightneſs, by ſo doing, raiſe themſelves to a more ſecure ſtate of virtue. To ſay that the former is accounted for by the nature of liberty, is to ſay no more, than that an event's actually happening is accounted for by a mere poſſibility of its happening. But it ſeems diſtinctly conceivable from the very nature of particular affections or propenſions. For, ſuppoſe creatures intended for ſuch a particular ſtate of life, for which ſuch propenſions were neceſſary: Suppoſe them endued with ſuch propenſions, together with moral underſtanding, as well including a practical ſenſe of virtue, as a ſpeculative perception of it; and that all theſe ſeveral principles, both natural and moral, forming an inward conſtitution of mind, were in the moſt exact proportion poſſible; *i. e.* in a proportion the

moſt exactly adapted to their intended ſtate of life: Such creatures would be made upright, or finitely perfect. Now particular propenſions, from their very nature, muſt be felt, the objects of them being preſent; though they cannot be gratified at all, or not with the allowance of the moral principle. But if they can be gratified without its allowance, or by contradicting it; then they muſt be conceived to have ſome tendency, in how low a degree ſoever, yet ſome tendency, to induce perſons to ſuch forbidden gratification. This tendency, in ſome one particular propenſion, may be increaſed, by the greater frequency of occaſions naturally exciting it, than of occaſions exciting others. The leaſt voluntary indulgence in forbidden circumſtances, though but in thought, will increaſe this wrong tendency; and may increaſe it further, till, peculiar conjunctures perhaps conſpiring, it becomes effect; and danger of deviating from right, ends in actual deviation from it: a danger neceſſarily ariſing from the very nature of propenſion; and which therefore could not have been prevented, though it might have been eſcaped, or got innocently through. The caſe would be, as if we were to ſuppoſe a ſtrait path marked out for a perſon, in which ſuch a degree of attention would keep him ſteady: But if he would not attend in this degree, any one of a thouſand objects, catching his eye, might lead him out of it. Now it is impoſſible to ſay, how much, even the firſt full overt act of irregularity, might diſorder the inward conſtitution; unſettle the adjuſtments, and alter

the proportions, which formed it, and in which the uprightneſs of its make conſiſted: But repetition of irregularities would produce habits. And thus the conſtitution would be ſpoiled; and creatures made upright, become corrupt, and depraved in their ſettled character, proportionably to their repeated irregularities in occaſional acts. But on the contrary, theſe creatures might have improved and raiſed themſelves, to an higher and more ſecure ſtate of virtue, by the contrary behaviour: by ſteadily following the moral principle, ſuppoſed to be one part of their nature; and thus withſtanding that unavoidable danger of defection, which neceſſarily aroſe from propenſion, the other part of it. For, by thus preſerving their integrity for ſome time, their danger would leſſen; ſince propenſions by being inured to ſubmit, would do it more eaſily and of courſe: and their ſecurity againſt this leſſening danger would increaſe; ſince the moral principle would gain additional ſtrength by exerciſe: both which things are implied in the notion of virtuous habits. Thus then vitious indulgence, is not only criminal in itſelf, but alſo depraves the inward conſtitution and character. And virtuous ſelf-government, is not only right in itſelf, but alſo improves the inward conſtitution or character: and may improve it to ſuch a degree, that though we ſhould ſuppoſe it impoſſible, for particular affections to be abſolutely coincident with the moral principle; and conſequently ſhould allow, that ſuch creatures as have been above ſuppoſed, would for ever remain defectible; yet their danger of actually deviating from right, may be almoſt infinitely leſſened, and

they fully fortified againſt what remains of it: if that may be called danger, againſt which, there is an adequate effectual ſecurity. But ſtill, this their higher perfection may continue to conſiſt in habits of virtue formed in a ſtate of diſcipline, and this their more compleat ſecurity remain to proceed from them. And thus it is plainly conceivable, that creatures without blemiſh, as they came out of the hands of God, may be in danger of going wrong; and ſo may ſtand in need of the ſecurity of virtuous habits, additional to the moral principle wrought into their natures by him. That which is the ground of their danger, or their want of ſecurity, may be conſidered as a deficiency in them, to which virtuous habits are the natural ſupply. And as they are naturally capable of being raiſed and improved by diſcipline, it may be a thing fit and requiſite, that they ſhould be placed in circumſtances with an eye to it: in circumſtances peculiarly fitted to be, to them, a ſtate of diſcipline for their improvement in virtue.

13 But how much more ſtrongly muſt this hold with reſpect to thoſe, who have corrupted their natures, are fallen from their original rectitude, and whoſe paſſions are become exceſſive by repeated violations of their inward conſtitution? Upright creatures may want to be improved: depraved creatures want to be renewed. Education and diſcipline, which may be in all degrees and ſorts of gentleneſs and of ſeverity, is expedient for thoſe: but muſt be abſolutely neceſſary for theſe. For theſe, diſcipline of the ſeverer ſort too, and in the higher degrees of it,

muſt be neceſſary, in order to wear out vicious habits; to recover their primitive ſtrength of ſelf-government, which indulgence muſt have weakened; to repair, as well as raiſe into an habit, the moral principle, in order to their arriving at a ſecure ſtate of virtuous happineſs.

16 Now whoever will conſider the thing, may clearly ſee, that the preſent world is *peculiarly fit* to be a ſtate of diſcipline for this purpoſe, to ſuch as will ſet themſelves to mend and improve. For, the various temptations with which we are ſurrounded; our experience of the deceits of wickedneſs; having been in many inſtances led wrong ourſelves; the great viciouſneſs of the world; the infinite diſorders conſequent upon it; our being made acquainted with pain and ſorrow, either from our own feeling of it, or from the ſight of it in others; theſe things, though ſome of them may indeed produce wrong effects upon our minds, yet when duly reflected upon, have, all of them, a direct tendency to bring us to a ſettled moderation and reaſonableneſs of temper: the contrary both to thoughtleſs levity, and alſo to that unreſtrained ſelf-will, and violent bent to follow preſent inclination, which may be obſerved in undiſciplined minds. Such experience, as the preſent ſtate affords, of the frailty of our nature; of the boundleſs extravagance of ungoverned paſſion; of the power which an Infinite Being has over us, by the various capacities of miſery which he has given us; in ſhort, that kind and degree of experience, which the preſent ſtate affords us, that the conſtitution of nature is ſuch as to admit the poſſibility, the

danger, and the actual event, of creatures loſing their innocence and happineſs, and becoming vitious and wretched; hath a tendency to give us a practical ſenſe of things, very different from a mere ſpeculative knowledge, that we are liable to vice, and capable of miſery. And who knows, whether the ſecurity of creatures in the higheſt and moſt ſettled ſtate of perfection, may not in part ariſe, from their having had ſuch a ſenſe of things as this, formed, and habitually fixt within them, in ſome ſtate of probation. And paſſing through the preſent world with that moral attention, which is neceſſary to the acting a right part in it, may leave everlaſting impreſſions of this ſort upon our minds. But to be a little more diſtinct: Allurements to what is wrong; difficulties in the diſcharge of our duty; our not being able to act an uniform right part without ſome thought and care; and the opportunities which we have, or imagine we have, of avoiding what we diſlike, or obtaining what we deſire, by unlawful means, when we either cannot do it at all, or at leaſt not ſo eaſily, by lawful ones; theſe things, *i. e.* the ſnares and temptations of vice, are what render the preſent world peculiarly fit to be a ſtate of diſcipline, to thoſe who will preſerve their integrity: becauſe they render being upon our guard, reſolution, and the denial of our paſſions, neceſſary in order to that end. And the exerciſe of ſuch particular recollection, intention of mind, and ſelf-government, in the practice of virtue, has, from the make of our nature, a peculiar tendency to form habits of virtue; as implying, not only a real, but alſo a more

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continued, and a more intenſe exerciſe of the virtuous principle; or a more conſtant and a ſtronger effort of virtue exerted into act. Thus ſuppoſe a perſon to know himſelf to be in particular danger, for ſome time, of doing any thing wrong, which yet he fully reſolves not to do: Continued recollection, and keeping upon his guard, in order to make good his reſolution, is a *continued* exerting of that act of virtue in a *high degree*, which need have been, and perhaps would have been, only *inſtantaneous* and *weak*, had the temptation been ſo. It is indeed ridiculous to aſſert, that ſelf-denial is eſſential to virtue and piety: But it would have been nearer the truth, though not ſtrictly the truth itſelf, to have ſaid, that it is eſſential to diſcipline and improvement. For though actions materially virtuous, which have no ſort of difficulty, but are perfectly agreeable to our particular inclinations, may poſſibly be done only from theſe particular inclinations, and ſo may not be any exerciſe of the principle of virtue, *i. e.* not be virtuous actions at all; yet on the contrary, they may be an exerciſe of that principle: and when they are, they have a tendency to form and fix the habit of virtue. But when the exerciſe of the virtuous principle is more continued, oftener repeated, and more intenſe; as it muſt be in circumſtances of danger, temptation and difficulty, of any kind and in any degree; this tendency is increaſed proportionably, and a more confirmed habit is the conſequence.

17 THIS undoubtedly holds to a certain length; but how far it may hold, I know not. Neither our in-

tellectual powers, nor our bodily ſtrength, can be improved beyond ſuch a degree: and both may be over-wrought. Poſſibly there may be ſomewhat analogous to this, with reſpect to the moral character; which is ſcarce worth conſidering. And I mention it only, leſt it ſhould come into ſome perſons thoughts, not as an exception to the foregoing obſervations, which perhaps it is; but as a confutation of them, which it is not. And there may be ſeveral other exceptions. Obſervations of this kind cannot be ſuppoſed to hold minutely, and in every caſe. It is enough that they hold in general. And theſe plainly hold ſo far, as that from them may be ſeen diſtinctly, which is all that is intended by them, that *the preſent world is peculiarly fit to be a ſtate of diſcipline, for our improvement in virtue and piety*: in the ſame ſenſe as ſome ſciences, by requiring and engaging the attention, not to be ſure of ſuch perſons as will not, but of ſuch as will, ſet themſelves to them; are fit to form the mind to habits of attention.

INDEED the preſent ſtate is ſo far from proving, in event, a diſcipline of virtue to the generality of men, that, on the contrary, they ſeem to make it a diſcipline of vice. And the viciouſneſs of the world is, in different ways, the great temptation, which renders it a ſtate of virtuous diſcipline, in the degree it is, to good men. The whole end, and the whole occaſion, of mankind's being placed in ſuch a ſtate as the preſent, is not pretended to be accounted for. That which appears amidſt the general corruption, is, that there are ſome perſons,

who, having within them the principle of amendment and recovery, attend to and follow the notices of virtue and religion, be they more clear or more obſcure, which are afforded them; and that the preſent world is, not only an exerciſe of virtue in theſe perſons, but an exerciſe of it in ways and degrees, peculiarly apt to improve it: apt to improve it, in ſome reſpects, even beyond what would be, by the exerciſe of it required in a perfectly virtuous ſociety, or in a ſociety of equally imperfect virtue with themſelves. But that the preſent world does not actually become a ſtate of moral diſcipline to many, even to the generality, *i. e.* that they do not improve or grow better in it, cannot be urged as a proof, that it was not intended for moral diſcipline, by any who at all obſerve the analogy of Nature. For, of the numerous ſeeds of vegetables and bodies of animals, which are adapted and put in the way, to improve to ſuch a point or ſtate of natural maturity and perfection, we do not ſee perhaps that one in a million actually does. Far the greateſt part of them decay before they are improved in it; and appear to be abſolutely deſtroyed. Yet no one, who does not deny all final cauſes, will deny, that thoſe ſeeds and bodies, which do attain to that point of maturity and perfection, anſwer the end for which they were really deſigned by nature; and therefore that nature deſigned them for ſuch perfection. And I cannot forbear adding, though it is not to the preſent purpoſe, that the *appearance* of ſuch an amazing *waſte* in nature, with reſpect

to theſe ſeeds and bodies, by foreign cauſes, is to us as unaccountable, as, what is much more terrible, the preſent and future ruin of ſo many moral agents by themſelves, *i. e.* by vice.

§ AGAINST this whole notion of moral diſcipline, it may be objected, in another way; that ſo far as a courſe of behaviour, materially virtuous, proceeds from hope and fear, ſo far it is only a diſcipline and ſtrengthening of ſelf-love. But doing what God commands, becauſe he commands it, is obedience, though it proceeds from hope or fear. And a courſe of ſuch obedience will form habits of it. And a conſtant regard to veracity, juſtice and charity, may form diſtinct habits of theſe particular virtues; and will certainly form habits of ſelf-government, and of denying our inclinations, whenever veracity, juſtice, or charity requires it. Nor is there any foundation for this great nicety, with which ſome affect to diſtinguiſh in this caſe, in order to depreciate all religion proceeding from hope or fear. For, veracity, juſtice and charity, regard to God's authority, and to our own chief intereſt, are not only all three coincident: but each of them is, in itſelf, a juſt and natural motive or principle of action. And he who begins a good life from any one of them, and perſeveres in it, as he is already in ſome degree, ſo he cannot fail of becoming more and more, of that character, which is correſpondent to the conſtitution of nature as moral; and to the relation, which God ſtands in to us as moral Governor of it: nor conſequently can he fail of ob-

taining that happineſs, which this conſtitution and relation neceſſarily ſuppoſe connected with that character.

20 THESE ſeveral obſervations, concerning the active principle of virtue and obedience to God's command, are applicable to paſſive ſubmiſſion or reſignation to his will: which is another eſſential part of a right character, connected with the former, and very much in our power to form ourſelves to. It may be imagined, that nothing but afflictions can give occaſion for, or require this virtue; that it can have no reſpect to, nor be any way neceſſary to qualify for, a ſtate of perfect happineſs: but it is not experience which can make us think thus. Proſperity itſelf, whilſt any thing ſuppoſed deſirable is not ours, begets extravagant and unbounded thoughts. Imagination is altogether as much a ſource of diſcontent, as any thing in our external condition. It is indeed true, that there can be no ſcope for patience, when ſorrow ſhall be no more: but there may be need for a temper of mind, which ſhall have been formed by patience. For, though ſelf-love, conſidered merely as an active principle leading us to purſue our chief intereſt, cannot but be uniformly coincident with the principle of obedience to God's commands, our intereſt being rightly underſtood; becauſe this obedience, and the purſuit of our own chief intereſt, muſt be in every caſe one and the ſame thing: yet it may be queſtioned, whether ſelf-love, conſidered merely as the deſire of our own intereſt or happineſs, can, from its nature, be thus abſolutely and uniformly coincident with the will of

God; any more than particular affections can*; coincident in ſuch ſort, as not to be liable to be excited upon occaſions and in degrees, impoſſible to be gratified conſiſtently with the conſtitution of things, or the Divine appointments. So that *habits* of reſignation may, upon this account, be requiſite for all creatures; habits, I ſay; which ſignify what is formed by uſe. However, in general, it is obvious, that both ſelf-love and particular affections in human creatures, conſidered only as paſſive feelings, diſtort and rend the mind; and therefore ſtand in need of diſcipline. Now denial of thoſe particular affections, in a courſe of active virtue and obedience to God's will, has a tendency to moderate them; and ſeems alſo to have a tendency to habituate the mind, to be eaſy and ſatisfied with that degree of happineſs which is allotted us, *i. e.* to moderate ſelf-love. But the proper diſcipline for reſignation, is affliction. For a right behaviour under that trial; recollecting ourſelves ſo as to conſider it in the view, in which religion teaches us to conſider it, as from the hand of God; receiving it as what He appoints, or thinks proper to permit, in His world and under His government; this will habituate the mind to a dutiful ſubmiſſion. And ſuch ſubmiſſion, together with the active principle of obedience, make up the temper and character in us, which anſwers to his ſovereignty; and which abſolutely belongs to the condition of our being, as dependent creatures. Nor can it be ſaid, that this is only breaking the mind to a ſubmiſſion to mere power; for mere power

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may be accidental, and precarious, and uſurped: But it is forming within ourſelves the temper of reſignation to His rightful authority, who is, by nature, ſupream over all.

21 UPON the whole: Such a character, and ſuch qualifications, are neceſſary for a mature ſtate of life in the preſent world, as nature alone does in no wiſe beſtow; but has put it upon us, in great part, to acquire, in our progreſs from one ſtage of life to another, from childhood to mature age: put it upon us to acquire them, by giving us capacities of doing it, and by placing us, in the beginning of life, in a condition fit for it. And this is a general analogy to our condition in the preſent world, as in a ſtate of moral diſcipline for another. It is in vain then to object againſt the credibility of the preſent life's being intended for this purpoſe, that all the trouble and the danger, unavoidably accompanying ſuch diſcipline, might have been ſaved us, by our being made at once the creatures and the characters, *which we were to be*. For we experience, that *what we were to be*, was to be the effect of *what we would do*: and that the general conduct of Nature is, not to ſave us trouble or danger, but to make us capable of going through them, and to put it upon us to do ſo. Acquirements of our own, experience and habits, are the *natural* ſupply to our deficiencies, and ſecurity againſt our dangers: ſince it is as plainly natural to ſet ourſelves to acquire the qualifications, as the external things, which we ſtand in need of. In particular, it is as plainly a general law of Nature, that we ſhould, with regard to our temporal

intereſt, form and cultivate practical principles within us, by attention, uſe and diſcipline, as any thing whatever is a natural law; chiefly in the beginning of life, but alſo throughout the whole courſe of it. And the alternative is left to our choice: either to improve ourſelves, and better our condition: or, in default of ſuch improvement, to remain deficient and wretched. It is therefore perfectly credible, from the analogy of Nature, that the ſame may be our caſe, with reſpect to the happineſs of a future ſtate, and the qualifications neceſſary for it.

22 THERE is a third thing, which may ſeem implied in the preſent world's being a ſtate of probation; that it is a theatre of action, for the manifeſtation of perſons characters, with reſpect to a future one: not to be ſure to an All-knowing Being, but to his creation or part of it. This may, perhaps, be only a conſequence of our being in a ſtate of probation in the other ſenſes. However, it is not impoſſible, that mens ſhewing and making manifeſt, what is in their heart, what their real character is, may have reſpect to a future life, in ways and manners which we are not acquainted with: particularly it may be a means, for the Author of Nature does not appear to do any thing without means, of their being diſpoſed of ſuitably to their characters; and of its being known to the creation, by way of example, that they are thus diſpoſed of. But not to enter upon any conjectural account of this; One may juſt

the manifestation of persons characters, contributes very much, in various ways, to the carrying on a great part of that general course of nature, respecting mankind, which comes under our observation at present. I shall only add, that probation, in both these senses, as well as in that treated of in the foregoing chapter, is implied in moral government: since by persons behaviour under it, their characters cannot but be manifested, and if they behave well, improved.

END of chap. II

PART I.

CHAP. VI.

Of the Opinion of Neceſſity, conſidered as influencing Practice.

THROUGHOUT the foregoing treatiſe it appears, that the condition of mankind, conſidered as inhabitants of this world only, and under the government of God which we experience; is greatly analogous to our condition, as deſigned for another world, or under that farther government, which religion teaches us. If therefore any aſſert, as a fataliſt muſt, that the opinion of univerſal neceſſity is reconcileable with the former; there immediately ariſes a queſtion in the way of analogy, whether he muſt not alſo own it to be reconcileable with the latter, *i. e.* with the ſyſtem of religion itſelf, and the proof of it. The reader then will obſerve, that the queſtion now before us is not abſolute, Whether the opinion of fate be reconcileable with religion; but hypothetical, whether upon ſuppoſition of its being reconcileable with the conſtitution of nature, it be not reconcileable with religion alſo: Or, what pretence a fataliſt, not of other perſons, but a fataliſt, has to conclude from his opinion, that there can be no ſuch thing as religion. And as the puzzle and obſcurity, which muſt unavoidably ariſe from arguing upon ſo abſurd a ſuppoſition as that of univerſal neceſſity,

will, I fear, eaſily be ſeen; it will, I hope, as eaſily be excuſed.

¶ But ſince it has been all along taken for granted, as a thing proved, that there is an intelligent Author of Nature, or natural governor of the world; and ſince an objection may be made againſt the proof of this, from the opinion of univerſal neceſſity, as it may be ſuppoſed, that ſuch neceſſity will itſelf account for the origin and preſervation of all things: it is requiſite, that this objection be diſtinctly anſwered; or that it be ſhewn, that a fatality, ſuppoſed conſiſtent with what we certainly experience, does not deſtroy the proof of an intelligent Author and Governor of Nature; before we proceed to conſider, whether it deſtroys the proof of a moral governor of it, or of our being in a ſtate of religion.

¶ Now, when it is ſaid by a fataliſt, that the whole conſtitution of Nature, and the actions of men, that every thing, and every mode and circumſtance of every thing, is neceſſary, and could not poſſibly have been otherwiſe; it is to be obſerved, that this neceſſity does not exclude deliberation, choice, preference, and acting from certain principles, and to certain ends: becauſe all this is matter of undoubted experience, acknowledged by all, and what every man may, every moment, be conſcious of. And from hence it follows, that neceſſity, alone and of itſelf, is in no ſort an account of the conſtitution of Nature, and how things came *to be* and *to continue* as they are;

but only an account of this *circumſtance*, relating to their origin and continuance, that they could not have been otherwiſe, than they are and have been. The aſſertion that every thing is by neceſſity of Nature, is not an anſwer to the queſtion; Whether the world came into being as it is, by an intelligent Agent forming it thus, or not: But to quite another queſtion; Whether it came into being as it is, in that way and manner which we call *neceſſarily*, or in that way and manner which we call *freely*. For ſuppoſe farther, that one who was a fataliſt, and one who kept to his natural ſenſe of things, and believed himſelf a free agent, were diſputing together, and vindicating their reſpective opinions; and they ſhould happen to inſtance in a houſe; they would agree, that it was built by an architect. Their difference concerning neceſſity and freedom, would occaſion no difference of judgment concerning this; but only concerning another matter; whether the architect built it neceſſarily or freely. Suppoſe then they ſhould proceed to enquire concerning the conſtitution of nature: In a lax way of ſpeaking, One of them might ſay, it was by neceſſity; and the other by freedom: But if they had any meaning to their words, as the latter muſt mean a free agent, ſo the former muſt at length be reduced to mean an agent, whether he would ſay one or more, acting by neceſſity: for abſtract notions can do nothing. Indeed we aſcribe to God a neceſſary exiſtence, uncauſed by any agent. For we find wthin ourſelves the idea of infinity, *i. e.* immenſity and eternity, impoſſible, even in imagination, to be removed

out of being. We ſeem to diſcern intuitively, that there muſt, and cannot but be ſomewhat, external to ourſelves, anſwering this idea, or the archetype of it. And from hence (for *This abſtract*, as much as any other, implies a *concrete*) we conclude, that there is and cannot but be, an infinite, an immenſe eternal Being exiſting, prior to all deſign contributing to his exiſtence, and excluſive of it. And from the ſcantineſs of language, a manner of ſpeaking has been introduced; that neceſſity is the foundation, the reaſon, the account of the exiſtence of God. But it is not alledged, nor can it be at all intended, that *every thing* exiſts as it does, by this kind of neceſſity; a neceſſity antecedent in nature to deſign: it cannot, I ſay, be meant that every thing exiſts as it does, by this kind of neceſſity, upon ſeveral accounts; and particularly becauſe it is admitted, that deſign, in the actions of men, contributes to many alterations in nature. For if any deny this, I ſhall not pretend to reaſon with them.

4 FROM theſe things it follows; *Firſt*, that when a fataliſt aſſerts, that every thing is *by neceſſity*, he muſt mean, *by an agent acting neceſſarily*; he muſt I ſay mean this, for I am very ſenſible, he would not chuſe to mean it: And *Secondly*, That the neceſſity, by which ſuch an agent is ſuppoſed to act, does not exclude intelligence and deſign. So that, were the ſyſtem of fatality admitted; it would juſt as much account for the formation of the world, as for the ſtructure of an houſe, and no more. Neceſſity as much requires and ſuppoſes a neceſſary

agent, as freedom requires and ſuppoſes a free agent, to be the former of the world. And the appearances of *deſign* and of *final cauſes* in the conſtitution of Nature, as really prove this acting agent, to be an *intelligent deſigner*, or to act from choice; upon the ſcheme of neceſſity, ſuppoſed poſſible, as upon that of freedom.

5

It appearing thus, that the notion of neceſſity does not deſtroy the proof that there is an intelligent Author and natural Governor of the world; the preſent queſtion, which the analogy before mentioned * ſuggeſts, and which, I think it will anſwer, is this: Whether the opinion of neceſſity, ſuppoſed conſiſtent with poſſibility, with the conſtitution of the world, and the natural government which we experience exerciſed over it; deſtroys all reaſonable ground of belief, that we are in a ſtate of religion: or whether that opinion be reconcileable with religion; with the ſyſtem, and the proof of it.

6

Suppose then a fataliſt to educate any one, from his youth up, in his own principles; that the child ſhould reaſon upon them, and conclude, that ſince he cannot poſſibly behave otherwiſe than he does, he is not a ſubject of blame or commendation, nor can deſerve to be rewarded or puniſhed: Imagine him to eradicate the very perceptions of blame and commendation out of his mind, by means of this ſyſtem; to form his temper, and character, and behaviour to it; and from it to judge

of the treatment he was to expect, ſay, from reaſonable men, upon his coming abroad into the world: as the fataliſt judges from this ſyſtem, what he is to expect from the Author of nature, and with regard to a future ſtate. I cannot forbear ſtopping here to aſk, whether any one of common ſenſe would think fit, that a child ſhould be put upon theſe ſpeculations, and be left to apply them to practice. And a man has little pretence to reaſon, who is not ſenſible, that we are all children in ſpeculations of this kind. However, the child would doubtleſs be highly delighted to find himſelf freed from the reſtraints of fear and ſhame, with which his play-fellows were fettered and embarraſſed; and highly conceited in his ſuperior knowledge, ſo far beyond his years. But conceit and vanity would be the leaſt bad part of the influence, which theſe principles muſt have, when thus reaſoned and acted upon, during the courſe of his education. He muſt either be allowed to go on and be the plague of all about him, and himſelf too, even to his own deſtruction: or elſe correction muſt be continually made uſe of, to ſupply the want of thoſe natural perceptions of blame and commendation, which we have ſuppoſed to be removed; and to give him a practical impreſſion, of what he had reaſoned himſelf out of the belief of, that he was in fact an accountable child, and to be puniſhed for doing what he was forbid. It is therefore in reality impoſſible, but that the correction which he muſt meet with, in the courſe of his education, muſt convince him, that if the ſcheme he was inſtructed in were not falſe; yet that he reaſoned inconcluſive-

ly upon it, and ſome how or other miſapplied it to practice and common life: As what the fataliſt experiences of the conduct of Providence at preſent, ought in all reaſon to convince him, that this ſcheme is miſapplied, when applied to the ſubject of religion *. But ſuppoſing the child's temper could remain ſtill formed to the ſyſtem, and his expectation of the treatment he was to have in the world be regulated by it; ſo as to expect that no reaſonable man would blame or puniſh him, for any thing which he ſhould do, becauſe he could not help doing it: Upon this ſuppoſition, it is manifeſt he would, upon his coming abroad into the world, be inſupportable to ſociety, and the treatment which he would receive from it, would render it ſo to him; and he could not fail of doing ſomewhat, very ſoon, for which he would be delivered over into the hands of civil juſtice. And thus, in the end, he would be convinced of the obligations he was under to his wiſe inſtructor. Or ſuppoſe this ſcheme of fatality, in any other way, applied to practice, ſuch practical application of it, will be found equally abſurd; equally fallacious, in a practical ſenſe: For inſtance, that if a man be deſtined to live ſuch a time, he ſhall live to it, though he take no care of his own preſervation; or if he be deſtined to die before that time, no care can prevent it: therefore all care about preſerving one's life is to be neglected: which is the fallacy inſtanced in by the antients. But now on the contrary, none of theſe practical abſurdities can be drawn, from reaſoning upon the ſuppoſition, that we are free; but all ſuch reaſoning with

* Pag. 137, 138.

regard to the common affairs of life, is juſtified by experience. And therefore, though it were admitted that this opinion of neceſſity were ſpeculatively true; yet, with regard to practice, it is as if it were falſe, ſo far as our experience reaches; that is, to the whole of our preſent life. For, the conſtitution of the preſent world, and the condition in which we are actually placed, is, as if we were free. And it may perhaps juſtly be concluded, that ſince the whole proceſs of action, through every ſtep of it, ſuſpence, deliberation, inclining one way, determining, and at laſt doing as we determine, is as if we were free, therefore we are ſo. But the thing here inſiſted upon is, that under the preſent natural government of the world, we find we are treated and dealt with, as if we were free, prior to all conſideration whether we are or not. Were this opinion therefore of Neceſſity admitted to be ever ſo true; yet ſuch is in fact our condition and the natural courſe of things, that whenever we apply it to life and practice, this application of it, always miſleads us, and cannot but miſlead us, in a moſt dreadful manner, with regard to our preſent intereſt. And how can people think themſelves ſo very ſecure then, that the ſame application of the ſame opinion may not miſlead them alſo, in ſome analogous manner, with reſpect to a future, a more general and more important intereſt? For, religion being a practical ſubject; and the analogy of nature ſhewing us, that we have not faculties to apply this opinion, were it a true one, to practical ſubjects; whenever we do apply it to the ſubject of religion, and thence conclude, that we are free from

its obligations, it is plain this concluſion cannot be depended upon. There will ſtill remain juſt reaſon to think, whatever appearances are, that we deceive ourſelves; in ſomewhat of a like manner, as when people fancy they can draw contradictory concluſions from the idea of infinity.

7 FROM theſe things together, the attentive reader will ſee it follows, that if upon ſuppoſition of freedom the evidence of religion be concluſive, it remains ſo, upon ſuppoſition of neceſſity; becauſe the notion of neceſſity is not applicable to practical ſubjects: *i. e.* with reſpect to them, is as if it were not true. Nor does this contain any reflection upon reaſon: but only upon what is unreaſonable. For to pretend to act upon reaſon, in oppoſition to practical principles, which the Author of our nature gave us to act upon; and to pretend to apply our reaſon to ſubjects, with regard to which, our own ſhort views, and even our experience, will ſhew us, it cannot be depended upon; and ſuch, at beſt, the ſubject of neceſſity muſt be; this is vanity, conceit, and unreaſonableneſs.

8 BUT this is not all. For we find within ourſelves a will, and are conſcious of a character. Now if this, in us, be reconcileable with fate, it is reconcileable with it, in the Author of Nature. And beſides, natural government and final cauſes, imply a character, and a will in the governor and deſigner *;

* By WILL and CHARACTER is meant that, which, in ſpeaking of men, we ſhould expreſs, not only by theſe words, but alſo by the words, *Temper, taſte, diſpoſitions, practical principles, that whole frame of mind, from whence we act in one manner rather than another.*

a will concerning the creatures whom he governs. The Author of Nature then being certainly by ſome character or other, notwithſtanding neceſſity; it is evident this neceſſity is as reconcileable with the particular character of benevolence, veracity, and juſtice in Him, which attributes are the foundation of religion, as with any other character: ſince we find this neceſſity no more hinders *Men* from being benevolent, than cruel; true, than faithleſs; juſt, than unjuſt; or if the fataliſt pleaſes, what we call unjuſt. For it is ſaid indeed, that what, upon ſuppoſition of freedom, would be juſt puniſhment; upon ſuppoſition of neceſſity, becomes manifeſtly unjuſt: becauſe it is puniſhment inflicted for doing that, which perſons could not avoid doing. As if the neceſſity, which is ſuppoſed to deſtroy the injuſtice of murder, for inſtance, would not alſo deſtroy the injuſtice of puniſhing it. However, as little to the purpoſe as this objection is in itſelf, it is very much to the purpoſe to obſerve from it, how the notions of juſtice and injuſtice remain, even whilſt we endeavour to ſuppoſe them removed; how they force themſelves upon the mind, even whilſt we are making ſuppoſitions deſtructive of them: For there is not, perhaps, a man in the world, but would be ready to make this objection at firſt thought.

1 BUT though it is moſt evident, that univerſal neceſſity, if it be reconcileable with any thing, is reconcileable with that character in the Author of Nature, which is the foundation of religion; "yet, "does it not plainly deſtroy the proof, that he is "of that character, and conſequently the proof of "religion?" By no means. For we find, that hap-

pineſs and miſery are not our fate, in any ſuch ſenſe as not to be the conſequences of our behaviour; but that they are the conſequences of it *. We find God exerciſes the ſame kind of government over us, with that, which a father exerciſes over his children, and a civil magiſtrate over his ſubjects. Now, whatever becomes of abſtract queſtions concerning liberty and neceſſity, it evidently appears to us, that veracity and juſtice muſt be the natural rule and meaſure of exerciſing this authority or government, to a being, who can have no competitions, or interfering of intereſts, with his creatures and his ſubjects.

10 BUT as the doctrine of liberty, though we experience its truth, may be perplexed with difficulties, which run up into the moſt abſtruſe of all ſpeculations; and as the opinion of neceſſity ſeems to be the very baſis, upon which infidelity grounds itſelf: it may be of ſome uſe to offer a more particular proof of the obligations of religion, which may diſtinctly be ſhewn not to be deſtroyed by this opinion.

11 THE proof from final cauſes of an intelligent Author of Nature, is not affected by the opinion of neceſſity; ſuppoſing neceſſity a thing poſſible in itſelf, and reconcileable with the conſtitution of things†. And it is a matter of fact, independent on this or any other ſpeculation, that he governs the world by the method of rewards and puniſhments‡: and alſo that he hath given us a moral faculty, by which we diſtinguiſh between actions,

* Ch. ii. † Pag. 229, &c. ‡ Ch. ii.

and approve ſome as virtuous and of good-deſert, and diſapprove others as vicious and of ill-deſert*. Now this moral diſcernment implies, in the notion of it, a rule of action, and a rule of a very peculiar kind; for it carries in it authority and a right of direction; authority in ſuch a ſenſe, as that we cannot depart from it without being ſelf-condemned†. And that the dictates of this moral faculty, which are by nature a rule to us, are moreover the laws of God, laws in a ſenſe including ſanctions; may be thus proved. Conſciouſneſs of a rule or guide of action, in creatures who are capable of conſidering it as given them by their Maker, not only raiſes immediately a ſenſe of duty, but alſo a ſenſe of ſecurity in following it, and of danger in deviating from it. A Direction of the Author of nature, given to creatures capable of looking upon it as ſuch, is plainly a command from him: and a command from him neceſſarily includes in it, at leaſt, an implicit promiſe in caſe of obedience, or threatning in caſe of diſobedience. But then the ſenſe or perception of good and ill deſert‡, which is contained in the moral diſcernment, renders the ſanction explicit, and makes it appear, as one may ſay, expreſſed. For ſince his method of government is to reward and puniſh actions, his having annexed to ſome actions an inſeparable ſenſe of good deſert, and to others of ill, this ſurely amounts to declaring, upon whom his puniſhments ſhall be inflicted, and his rewards be beſtowed. For he muſt have given us this diſcernment and ſenſe of things,

* Diſſert. II.

† Serm. 2. at the ROLLS. ‡ Diſſert. II.

as a pre-ſentiment of what is to be hereafter: that is, by way of information before-hand, what we are finally to expect in His world. There is then moſt evident ground to think, that the government of God, upon the whole, will be found to correſpond to the nature which he has given us: and that in the upſhot and iſſue of things, happineſs and miſery ſhall, in fact and event, be made to follow virtue and vice reſpectively; as He has already, in ſo peculiar a manner, aſſociated the ideas of them, in our minds. And from hence might eaſily be deduced the obligations of religious worſhip, were it only to be conſidered as a means, of preſerving upon our minds a ſenſe of this moral government of God, and ſecuring our obedience to it: which yet is an extremely imperfect view of that moſt important duty.

12 Now I ſay, no objection from neceſſity can lie againſt this general proof of religion. None againſt the propoſition reaſoned upon, that we have ſuch a moral faculty and diſcernment; becauſe this is a mere matter of fact, a thing of experience, that human kind is thus conſtituted: None againſt the concluſion; becauſe it is immediate and wholly from this fact. For the concluſion, that God will finally reward the righteous and puniſh the wicked, is not here drawn, from its appearing to us fit*,

* However, I am far from intending to deny, that the will of God is determined, by what is fit, by the right and reaſon of the caſe; tho' one chuſes to decline matters of ſuch abſtract ſpeculation, and to ſpeak with caution when one does ſpeak of them. But if it be intelligible to ſay, that *it is fit and reaſonable for every one*

that *He ſhould*; but from its appearing, that He has told us, *He will.* And this he hath certainly told us, in the promiſe and threatning, which it hath been obſerved the notion of a command implies, and the ſenſe of good and ill deſert which he has given us, more diſtinctly expreſſes. And this reaſoning from fact is confirmed, and in ſome degree even verified, by other facts; by the natural tendencies of virtue and of vice*; and by this, that God, in the natural courſe of his providence, puniſhes vicious actions as miſchievous to ſociety; and alſo vicious actions as ſuch in the ſtricteſt ſenſe†. So that the general proof of religion is unanſwerably real, even upon the wild ſuppoſition which we are arguing upon.

13 IT muſt likewiſe be obſerved farther, that natural religion hath, beſides this, an external evidence; which the doctrine of neceſſity, if it could be true, would not affect. For ſuppoſe a perſon, by the obſervations and reaſoning above, or by any other, convinced of the truth of religion;

to conſult his own happineſs, then, *fitneſs of action, or the right and reaſon of the caſe*, is an intelligible manner of ſpeaking. And it ſeems as inconceivable, to ſuppoſe God to approve one courſe of action, or one end, preferably to another, which yet his acting at all from deſign implies that he does, without ſuppoſing ſomewhat prior in that end, to be the ground of the preference; as to ſuppoſe him to diſcern an abſtract propoſition to be true, without ſuppoſing ſomewhat prior in it, to be the ground of the diſcernment. It doth not therefore appear, that moral right is any more relative to perception, than abſtract truth is: or that it is any more improper, to ſpeak of the fitneſs and rightneſs of actions and ends, as founded in the nature of things, than to ſpeak of abſtract truth, as thus founded.

* Pag. 70. † Pag. 60.

that there is a God, who made the world, who is the moral governor and judge of mankind, and will upon the whole deal with every one according to his works: I ſay, ſuppoſe a perſon convinced of this by reaſon; but to know nothing at all of antiquity, or the preſent ſtate of mankind. It would be natural for ſuch an one to be inquiſitive, what was the hiſtory of this ſyſtem of doctrine; at what time, and in what manner, it came firſt into the world; and whether it were believed by any conſiderable part of it. And were he upon inquiry to find, that a particular perſon, in a late age, firſt of all propoſed it, as a deduction of reaſon, and that mankind were before wholly ignorant of it: then, though its evidence from reaſon would remain, there would be no additional probability of its truth, from the account of its diſcovery. But inſtead of this being the fact of the caſe, on the contrary, he would find, what could not but afford him a very ſtrong confirmation of its truth: *Firſt*, That ſomewhat of this ſyſtem, with more or fewer additions and alterations, hath been profeſſed in all ages and countries, of which we have any certain information relating to this matter. *Secondly*, That it is certain hiſtorical fact, ſo far as we can trace things up, that this whole ſyſtem of belief, that there is one God, the Creator and moral Governor of the world, and that mankind is in a ſtate of religion, was received in the firſt ages. And *Thirdly*, That as there is no hint or intimation in hiſtory, that this ſyſtem was firſt reaſoned out; ſo there is (no) expreſs hiſtorical or traditional evidence, as antient as hiſtory, that it was taught firſt

by revelation. Now theſe things muſt be allowed to be of great weight. The firſt of them, general conſent, ſhews this ſyſtem to be conformable to the common ſenſe of mankind. The ſecond, namely, that religion was believed in the firſt ages of the world, eſpecially as it does not appear that there were then any ſuperſtitious or falſe additions to it, cannot but be a farther confirmation of its truth. For it is a proof of this alternative: either that it came into the world by revelation; or that it is natural, obvious, and forces itſelf upon the mind. The former of theſe is the concluſion of learned men. And whoever will conſider, how unapt for ſpeculation rude and uncultivated minds are, will, perhaps, from hence alone, be ſtrongly inclined to believe it the truth. And as it is ſhewn in the Second Part * of this treatiſe, that there is nothing of ſuch peculiar preſumption againſt a revelation in the beginning of the world, as there is ſuppoſed to be againſt ſubſequent ones: a Sceptic could not, I think, give any account, which would appear more probable even to himſelf, of the early pretenees to revelation; than by ſuppoſing ſome real original one, from whence they were copied. And the third thing above mentioned, that there is expreſs hiſtorical or traditional evidence as antient as hiſtory, of the ſyſtem of religion being taught mankind by revelation; this muſt be admitted as ſome degree of real proof, that it was ſo taught. For why ſhould not the moſt antient tradition be admitted, as ſome additional proof of a fact, againſt which there is no

* Chap. ii.

preſumption? And this proof is mentioned here, becauſe it has its weight to ſhew, that religion came into the world by revelation, prior to all conſideration of the proper authority of any book ſuppoſed to contain it: and even prior to all conſideration, whether the revelation itſelf be uncorruptly handed down and related, or mixed and darkned with fables. Thus the hiſtorical account, which we have, of the origin of religion, taking in all circumſtances, is a real confirmation of its truth, no way affected by the opinion of neceſſity. And the *external* evidence, even of natural religion, is by no means inconſiderable.

4 But it is carefully to be obſerved, and ought to be recollected after all proofs of virtue and religion, which are only general; that as ſpeculative reaſon may be neglected, prejudiced, and deceived: ſo alſo may our moral underſtanding be impaired and perverted, and the dictates of it not impartially attended to. This indeed proves nothing againſt the reality of our ſpeculative or practical faculties of perception; againſt their being intended by Nature, to inform us in the theory of things, and inſtruct us how we are to behave, and what we are to expect in conſequence of our behaviour. Yet our liableneſs, in the degree we are liable, to prejudice and perverſion, is a moſt ſerious admonition to us to be upon our guard, with reſpect to what is of ſuch conſequence, as our determinations concerning virtue and religion: and particularly not to take cuſtom, and faſhion, and ſlight notions of honour, or imaginations of preſent

eaſe, uſe and convenience to mankind, for the only moral rule*.

15 The foregoing obſervations, drawn from the nature of the thing, and the hiſtory of religion, amount, when taken together, to a real practical proof of it, not to be confuted: Such a proof as, conſidering the infinite importance of the thing, I apprehend, would be admitted fully ſufficient, in reaſon, to influence the actions of men, who act upon thought and reflection; if it were admitted, that there is no proof of the contrary. But it may be ſaid: "There are many probabilities, which cannot indeed be confuted, *i. e.* ſhewn to be no probabilities, and yet may be overbalanced, by greater probabilities, on the other ſide; much more by demonſtration. And there is no occaſion to object againſt particular arguments alledged for an opinion, when the opinion itſelf may be clearly ſhewn to be falſe, without meddling with ſuch arguments at all, but leaving them juſt as they are†. Now the method of government by rewards and puniſhments, and eſpecially rewarding and puniſhing good and ill deſert as ſuch reſpectively, muſt go upon ſuppoſition, that we are free and not neceſſary agents. And it is incredible, that the Author of Nature ſhould govern us upon a ſuppoſition as true, which he knows to be falſe: and therefore abſurd to think, he will reward or puniſh us for our actions hereafter; eſpecially that he will do it under the notion, that they are of good or ill deſert."

* Diſſert. II. † Pag. 1, 7.

Here then the matter is brought to a point. And the anſwer to all this is full, and not to be evaded: that the whole conſtitution and courſe of things, the whole analogy of providence, ſhews beyond poſſibility of doubt, that the concluſion from this reaſoning is falſe; wherever the fallacy lies. The doctrine of freedom indeed clearly ſhows where: in ſuppoſing ourſelves neceſſary, when in truth we are free agents. But upon the ſuppoſition of Neceſſity, the fallacy lies in taking for granted, that it is incredible neceſſary agents ſhould be rewarded and puniſhed. But that, ſome how or other, the concluſion now mentioned is falſe, is moſt certain. For it is fact, that God does govern even brute creatures by the method of rewards and puniſhments, in the natural courſe of things. And men are rewarded and puniſhed for their actions, puniſhed for actions miſchievous to ſociety as being ſo, puniſhed for vicious actions as ſuch; by the natural inſtrumentality of each other, under the preſent conduct of providence. Nay even the affection of gratitude, and the paſſion of reſentment, and the rewards and puniſhments following from them, which in general are to be conſidered as natural, *i. e.* from the Author of nature; theſe rewards and puniſhments, being naturally * annexed to actions conſidered as implying good intention and good deſert, ill intention and ill deſert; theſe natural rewards and puniſhments, I ſay, are as much a contradiction to the concluſion above, and ſhew its falſhood, as a more exact and compleat

* Serm. 8th, at the ROLLS.

rewarding and puniſhing of good and ill deſert as ſuch. So that if it be incredible, that neceſſary agents ſhould be thus rewarded and puniſhed; then, men are not neceſſary but free: ſince it is matter of fact, that they are thus rewarded and puniſhed; But if, on the contrary, which is the ſuppoſition we have been arguing upon, it be inſiſted, that men are neceſſary agents; then, there is nothing incredible in the farther ſuppoſition of neceſſary agents being thus rewarded and puniſhed: ſince we ourſelves are thus dealt with.

16 FROM the whole therefore it muſt follow, that a Neceſſity ſuppoſed poſſible, and reconcileable with the conſtitution of things, does in no ſort prove that the Author of Nature will not, nor deſtroy the proof that he will, finally and upon the whole, in his eternal government, render his creatures happy or miſerable, by ſome means or other, as they behave well or ill. Or, to expreſs this concluſion in words conformable to the title of the chapter, the analogy of nature ſhews us, that the opinion of Neceſſity, conſidered as practical, is falſe. And if Neceſſity, upon the ſuppoſition abovementioned, doth not deſtroy the proof of natural religion, it evidently makes no alteration in the proof of revealed.

17 FROM theſe things likewiſe we may learn, in what ſenſe to underſtand that general aſſertion, that the opinion of Neceſſity is eſſentially deſtructive of all religion. Firſt in a practical ſenſe; that by this notion, atheiſtical men pretend to ſatisfy and en-

courage themſelves in vice, and juſtify to others their diſregard to all religion. And ſecondly, in the ſtricteſt ſenſe; that it is a contradiction to the whole conſtitution of nature, and to what we may every moment experience in ourſelves, and ſo overturns every thing. But by no means is this aſſertion to be underſtood, as if Neceſſity, ſuppoſing it could poſſibly be reconciled with the conſtitution of things and with what we experience, were not alſo reconcileable with religion: for upon this ſuppoſition, it demonſtrably is ſo.

PART I.

CHAP. VII.

Of the Government of God, conſidered as a Scheme or Conſtitution, imperfectly comprehended.

THOUGH it be, as it cannot but be, acknowledged, that the analogy of nature gives a ſtrong credibility, to the general doctrine of religion, and to the ſeveral particular things contained in it, conſidered as ſo many matters of fact; and likewiſe that it ſhews this credibility not to be deſtroyed by any notions of Neceſſity: Yet ſtill, objections may be inſiſted upon, againſt the wiſdom, equity, and goodneſs of the Divine Government implied in the notion of religion, and againſt the method by which this government is conducted; to which objections analogy can be no direct anſwer. For the credibility, or the certain truth, of a matter of fact, does not immediately prove any thing concerning the wiſdom or goodneſs of it: and analogy can do no more, immediately or directly, than ſhew ſuch and ſuch things to be true or credible, conſidered only as matters of fact. But ſtill, if, upon ſuppoſition of a moral conſtitution of nature and a moral government over it, analogy ſuggeſts and makes it credible, that this government muſt be a ſcheme, ſyſtem or conſtitution of government, as diſtinguiſhed from a number of ſingle unconnected

acts of distributive justice and goodness; and likewise, that it must be a scheme, so imperfectly comprehended, and of such a sort in other respects, as to afford a direct general answer to all objections against the justice and goodness of it: then analogy is, remotely, of great service in answering those objections; both by suggesting the answer, and shewing it to be a credible one.

Now this, upon inquiry, will be found to be the case. For, *First*, Upon supposition that God exercises a moral government over the world, the analogy of his natural government, suggests and makes it credible, that His moral government must be a scheme, quite beyond our comprehension: and this affords a general answer to all objections against the justice and goodness of it. And, *Secondly*, A more distinct observation of some particular things contained in God's scheme of natural government, the like things being supposed by analogy, to be contained in His moral government, will farther shew, how little weight is to be laid upon these objections.

I. UPON supposition that God exercises a moral government over the world, the analogy of his natural government suggests and makes it credible, that his moral government must be a scheme, quite beyond our comprehension: And this affords a general answer to all objections against the justice and goodness of it. It is most obvious, analogy renders it highly credible, that upon supposition of a moral government, it must be a scheme; for the world

and the whole natural government of it, appears be ſo: to be a ſcheme, ſyſtem or conſtitution, whoſe parts correſpond to each other, and to a Whole; as really as any work of art, or as any particular model of a civil conſtitution and government. In this great ſcheme of the natural world, individuals have various peculiar relations to other individuals of their own ſpecies. And whole ſpecies are, we find, variouſly related to other ſpecies, upon this earth. Nor do we know, how much farther theſe kinds of relations may extend. And, as there is not any action or natural event, which we are acquainted with, ſo ſingle and unconnected, as not to have a reſpect to ſome other actions and events: ſo poſſibly each of them, when it has not an immediate, may yet have a remote, natural relation to other actions and events, much beyond the compaſs of this preſent world. There ſeems indeed nothing, from whence we can ſo much as make a conjecture, whether all creatures, actions and events, throughout the whole of Nature, have relations to each other. But, as it is obvious, that all events have future unknown conſequences; ſo, if we trace any, as far as we can go, into what is connected with it; we ſhall find, that if ſuch event were not connected with ſomewhat farther in nature unknown to us, ſomewhat both paſt and preſent, ſuch event could not poſſibly have been at all. Nor can we give the whole account of any one thing whatever: of all its cauſes, ends, and neceſſary adjuncts; thoſe adjuncts, I mean, without which it could not have been. By this moſt aſtoniſhing connexion, theſe reciprocal correſpondencies and

mutual relations, every thing which we ſee in the courſe of nature, is actually brought about. And things ſeemingly the moſt inſignificant imaginable, are perpetually obſerved to be neceſſary conditions to other things of the greateſt importance: So that any one thing whatever, may, for aught we know to the contrary, be a neceſſary condition to any other. The natural world then, and natural government of it, being ſuch an incomprehenſible ſcheme; ſo incomprehenſible, that a man muſt, really in the literal ſenſe, know nothing at all, who is not ſenſible of his ignorance in it: this immediately ſuggeſts, and ſtrongly ſhews the credibility, that the moral world and government of it may be ſo too. Indeed the natural and moral conſtitution and government of the world are ſo connected, as to make up together but one ſcheme: and it is highly probable, that the firſt is formed and carried on merely in ſubſerviency to the latter; as the vegetable world is for the animal, and organized bodies for minds. But the thing intended here, is, without inquiring how far the adminiſtration of the natural world is ſubordinate to that of the moral, only to obſerve the credibility, that one ſhould be analogous or ſimilar to the other: that therefore every act of Divine juſtice and goodneſs, may be ſuppoſed to look much beyond itſelf, and its immediate object; may have ſome reference to other parts of God's moral adminiſtration, and to a general moral plan: and that every circumſtance of this his moral government, may be adjuſted beforehand with a view to the whole of it. Thus for example: the determined length of time, and

the degrees and ways, in which virtue is to remain in a ſtate of warfare and diſcipline, and in which wickedneſs is permitted to have its progreſs; the times appointed for the execution of juſtice; the appointed inſtruments of it; the kinds of rewards and puniſhments, and the manners of their diſtribution; all particular inſtances of Divine juſtice and goodneſs, and every circumſtance of them, may have ſuch reſpects to each other, as to make up all together a Whole, connected and related in all its parts: a ſcheme or ſyſtem, which is as properly one as the natural world is, and of the like kind. And ſuppoſing this to be the caſe; it is moſt evident, that we are not competent judges of this ſcheme, from the ſmall parts of it, which come within our view in the preſent life: and therefore no objections againſt any of theſe parts, can be inſiſted upon by reaſonable men.

61 * THIS our ignorance, and the conſequence here drawn from it, are univerſally acknowledged, upon other occaſions; and, though ſcarce denied, yet are univerſally forgot, when perſons come to argue againſt religion. And it is not perhaps eaſy, even for the moſt reaſonable men, always to bear in mind the degree of our ignorance, and make due allowances for it. Upon theſe accounts, it may not be uſeleſs to go on a little farther, in order to ſhew more diſtinctly, how juſt an anſwer our ignorance is, to objections againſt the ſcheme of providence. Suppoſe then a perſon boldly to

* This and the following paragraphs are referred to above in Part I. ch. ii. p. 41.

aſſert, that the things complained of, the origin and continuance of evil, might eaſily have been prevented by repeated interpoſitions* ; interpoſitions ſo guarded and circumſtanced, as would preclude all miſchief ariſing from them: Or, if this were impracticable, that a *ſcheme* of government is itſelf an imperfection; ſince more good might have been produced, without any ſcheme, ſyſtem, or conſtitution at all, by continued ſingle unrelated acts of diſtributive juſtice and goodneſs; becauſe theſe would have occaſioned no irregularities. And farther than this, it is preſumed, the objections will not be carried. Yet the anſwer is obvious: that were theſe aſſertions true, ſtill the obſervations above, concerning our ignorance in the ſcheme of Divine government, and the conſequence drawn from it, would hold, in great meaſure; enough to vindicate religion, againſt all objections from the diſorders of the preſent ſtate. Were theſe aſſertions true, yet the government of the world might be juſt and good notwithſtanding; for, at the moſt, they would infer nothing more than that it might have been better. But indeed they are mere arbitrary aſſertions: no man being ſufficiently acquainted with the poſſibilities of things, to bring any proof of them, to the loweſt degree of probability. For however poſſible, what is aſſerted may ſeem; yet many inſtances may be alledged, in things much leſs out of our reach, of ſuppoſitions abſolutely impoſſible, and reducible to the moſt palpable ſelf-contradictions, which, not every one by any means would perceive to be ſuch, nor perhaps any one at

* Pag. 156, 157, &c.

firſt ſight ſuſpect. From theſe things, it is eaſy to ſee diſtinctly, how our ignorance, as it is the common, is really a ſatisfactory anſwer to all objections againſt the juſtice and goodneſs of providence. If a man contemplating any one providential diſpenſation, which had no relation to any others, ſhould object, that he diſcerned in it a diſregard to juſtice, or a deficiency of goodneſs; Nothing would be leſs an anſwer to ſuch objection, than our ignorance in other parts of providence, or in the poſſibilities of things, no way related to what he was contemplating. But when we know not, but the parts objected againſt may be relative to other parts unknown to us; and when we are unacquainted with what is, in the nature of the thing, practicable in the caſe before us; then our ignorance is a ſatisfactory anſwer: Becauſe, ſome unknown relation, or ſome unknown impoſſibility, may render what is objected againſt, juſt and good; nay good in the higheſt practicable degree.

II. AND how little weight is to be laid upon ſuch objections, will farther appear, by a more diſtinct obſervation of ſome particular things contained in the natural government of God, the like to which may be ſuppoſed, from analogy, to be contained in his moral government.

Firſt, AS in the ſcheme of the natural world, no ends appear to be accompliſhed without means: ſo we find that means very undeſireable, often conduce to bring about ends in ſuch a meaſure deſireable, as greatly to overbalance the diſagreeableneſs

of the means. And in caſes where ſuch means are conducive to ſuch ends, it is not reaſon, but experience, which ſhews us, that they are thus conducive. Experience alſo ſhews many means to be conducive and neceſſary to accompliſh ends, which means, before experience, we ſhould have thought, would have had even a contrary tendency. Now from theſe obſervations relating to the natural ſcheme of the world, the moral being ſuppoſed analogous to it, ariſes a great credibility, that the putting our miſery in each other's power to the degree it is, and making men liable to vice to the degree we are; and in general, that thoſe things, which are objected againſt the moral ſcheme of providence, may be, upon the whole, friendly and aſſiſtant to virtue, and productive of an over-balance of happineſs: *i. e.* The things objected againſt, may be means, by which an over-balance of good will, in the end, be found produced. And from the ſame obſervations, it appears to be no preſumption againſt this, that we do not, if indeed we do not, ſee thoſe means to have any ſuch tendency; or that they ſeem to us to have a contrary one. Thus thoſe things, which we call irregularities, may not be ſo at all: becauſe they may be means of accompliſhing wiſe and good ends more conſiderable. And it may be added, as above*, that they may alſo be the only means, by which theſe wiſe and good ends are capable of being accompliſhed.

AFTER theſe obſervations it may be proper to add, in order to obviate an abſurd and wicked concluſion

* Pag. 153.

from any of them, that though the conſtitution of our nature from whence we are capable of vice and miſery, may, as it undoubtedly does, contribute to the perfection and happineſs of the world; and though the actual permiſſion of evil may be beneficial to it: (*i. e.* it would have been more miſchievous, not that a wicked perſon had himſelf abſtained from his own wickedneſs, but that any one had forcibly prevented it, than that it was permitted:) Yet notwithſtanding, it might have been much better for the world, if this very evil had never been done. Nay, it is moſt clearly conceivable, that the very commiſſion of wickedneſs may be beneficial to the world, and yet, that it would be infinitely more beneficial for men to refrain from it. For thus, in the wiſe and good conſtitution of the natural world, there are diſorders which bring their own cures; diſeaſes, which are themſelves remedies. Many a man would have died, had it not been for the gout or a fever; yet it would be thought madneſs to aſſert, that ſickneſs is a better or more perfect ſtate than health; though the like, with regard to the moral world, has been aſſerted. But,

8 *Secondly*, THE natural government of the world, is carried on by general laws. For this there may be wiſe and good reaſons: the wiſeſt and beſt, for aught we know to the contrary. And that there are ſuch reaſons, is ſuggeſted to our thoughts, by the analogy of nature; by our being made to experience good ends to be accompliſhed, as indeed all the good which we enjoy is accompliſhed, by this means, that the laws, by which the world is govern-

ed, are general. For we have ſcarce any kind of enjoyments, but what we are, in ſome way or other, inſtrumental in procuring ourſelves, by acting in a manner which we foreſee likely to procure them: Now this foreſight could not be at all, were not the government of the world carried on by general laws. And though, for aught we know to the contrary, every ſingle caſe may be, at length, found to have been provided for even by theſe: yet to prevent all irregularities, or remedy them as they ariſe, by the wiſeſt and beſt general laws, may be impoſſible in the nature of things; as we ſee it is abſolutely impoſſible in civil government. But then we are ready to think, that, the conſtitution of nature remaining as it is, and the courſe of things being permitted to go on, in other reſpects, as it does, there might be interpoſitions to prevent irregularities; though they could not have been prevented or remedied by any general laws. And there would indeed be reaſon to wiſh, which, by the way, is very different from a right to claim, that all irregularities were prevented or remedied by preſent interpoſitions, if theſe interpoſitions would have no other effect than this. But it is plain they would have ſome viſible and immediate bad effects: for inſtance, they would encourage idleneſs and negligence; and they would render doubtful the natural rule of life, which is aſcertained by this very thing, that the courſe of the world is carried on by general laws. And farther, it is certain they would have diſtant effects, and very great ones too; by means of the wonderful connexi-

ons before-mentioned *. So that we cannot ſo much as gueſs, what would be the whole reſult of the interpoſitions deſired. It may be ſaid, any bad reſult might be prevented by farther interpoſitions, whenever there was occaſion for them: but this again is talking quite at random, and in the dark †. Upon the whole then, we ſee wiſe reaſons, why the courſe of the world ſhould be carried on by general laws, and good ends accompliſhed by this means: And, for aught we know, there may be the wiſeſt reaſons for it, and the beſt ends accompliſhed by it. We have no ground to believe, that all irregularities could be remedied as they ariſe, or could have been precluded, by general laws. We find that interpoſitions would produce evil, and prevent good: And, for aught we know, they would produce greater evil than they would prevent; and prevent greater good than they would produce. And if this be the caſe, then the not interpoſing is ſo far from being a ground of complaint, that it is an inſtance of goodneſs. This is intelligible and ſufficient: and going farther, ſeems beyond the utmoſt reach of our faculties.

BUT it may be ſaid, that "after all, theſe ſuppoſed "impoſſibilities and relations are what we are un- "acquainted with; and we muſt judge of religion, "as of other things, by what we do know, and "look upon the reſt as nothing: or however, that "the anſwers here given to what is objected againſt "religion, may equally be made uſe of to invalidate "the proof of it; ſince their ſtreſs lies ſo very much "upon our ignorance." But,

* Pag. 149, &c. † Pag. 152, 153, &c.

Firſt, THOUGH total ignorance in any matter, does indeed equally deſtroy, or rather preclude, all proof concerning it, and objections againſt it: yet partial ignorance does not. For we may in any degree, be convinced, that a perſon is of ſuch a character, and conſequently will purſue ſuch ends; though we are greatly ignorant, what is the proper way of acting, in order, the moſt effectually, to obtain thoſe ends: And in this caſe, objections againſt his manner of acting, as ſeemingly not conducive to obtain them, might be anſwered by our ignorance; though the proof that ſuch ends were intended, might not at all be invalidated by it. Thus, the proof of religion is a proof of the moral character of God, and conſequently that His government is moral, and that every one upon the whole ſhall receive according to his deſerts; a proof that this is the deſigned end of His government. But we are not competent judges, what is the proper way of acting, in order the moſt effectually to accompliſh this end *. Therefore our ignorance is an anſwer to objections againſt the conduct of Providence, in permitting irregularities, as ſeeming contradictory to this end. Now, ſince it is ſo obvious, that our ignorance may be a ſatisfactory anſwer to objections againſt a thing, and yet not affect the proof of it; till it can be ſhewn, it is frivolous to aſſert, that our ignorance invalidates the proof of religion, as it does the objections againſt it.

* Pag. 9, 10, 11.

Secondly, SUPPOSE unknown impoſſibilities, and unknown relations, might juſtly be urged to invalidate the proof of religion, as well as to anſwer objections againſt it: And that in conſequence of this, the proof of it were doubtful. Yet ſtill, let the aſſertion be deſpiſed, or let it be ridiculed, it is undeniably true, that moral obligations would remain certain, though it were not certain what would, upon the whole, be the conſequences of obſerving or violating them. For, theſe obligations ariſe immediately and neceſſarily from the judgment of our own mind, unleſs perverted, which we cannot violate without being ſelf-condemned. And they would be certain too, from conſiderations of intereſt. For though it were doubtful, what will be the future conſequences of virtue and vice; yet it is, however, credible, that they may have thoſe conſequences, which religion teaches us they will: And this credibility is a certain * obligation in point of prudence, to abſtain from all wickedneſs, and to live in the conſcientious practice of all that is good. But,

Thirdly, THE anſwers above given to the objections againſt religion, cannot equally be made uſe of to invalidate the proof of it. For, upon ſuppoſition that God exerciſes a moral government over the world, analogy does moſt ſtrongly lead us to conclude, that this moral government muſt be a ſcheme, or conſtitution, beyond our comprehenſi-

* Pag. 3. 4. And Part II. ch. vi.

on. And a thouſand particular analogies ſhew us, that parts of ſuch a ſcheme, from their relation to other parts, may conduce to accompliſh ends, which we ſhould have thought, they had no tendency at all to accompliſh: nay ends, which before experience, we ſhould have thought ſuch parts were contradictory to, and had a tendency to prevent. And therefore all theſe analogies ſhew, that the way of arguing made uſe of in objecting againſt religion, is deluſive: becauſe they ſhew it is not at all incredible, that, could we comprehend the whole, we ſhould find the permiſſion of the diſorders objected againſt, to be conſiſtent with juſtice and goodneſs; and even to be inſtances of them. Now this is not applicable to the proof of religion, as it is to the objections againſt it *; and therefore cannot invalidate that proof, as it does theſe objections.

Laſtly, FROM the obſervation now made, it is eaſy to ſee, that the anſwers above-given to the objections againſt Providence, though, in a general way of ſpeaking, they may be ſaid to be taken from our ignorance; yet are by no means taken merely from that, but from ſomewhat which analogy ſhews us concerning it. For analogy ſhews us poſitively, that our ignorance in the poſſibilities of things, and the various relations in nature, renders us incompetent judges, and leads us to falſe concluſions, in caſes ſimilar to this, in which we pretend to judge and to object. So that the things above inſiſted upon, are not mere ſuppoſitions of unknown im-

* Serm. at the ROLLS, Page 312. 2d edit.

poſſibilities and relations: but they are ſuggeſted to our thoughts, and even forced upon the obſervation of ſerious men, and rendered credible too, by the analogy of nature. And therefore, to take theſe things into the account, is to judge by experience and what we do know: and it is not judging ſo, to take no notice of them.

CONCLUSION.

THE Obſervations of the laſt chapter, * lead us to conſider this little ſcene of human life, in which we are ſo buſily engaged, as having a reference, of ſome ſort or other, to a much larger plan of things. Whether we are, any way, related to the more diſtant parts of the boundleſs univerſe, into which we are brought, is altogether uncertain. But it is evident, that the courſe of things, which comes within our view, is connected with ſomewhat paſt, preſent, and future, beyond it *. So that we are placed, as one may ſpeak, in the middle of a ſcheme, not a fixt but a progreſſive one, every way incomprehenſible: incomprehenſible, in a manner, equally, with reſpect to what has been, what now is, and what ſhall be hereafter. And this ſcheme cannot but contain in it ſomewhat, as wonderful, and as much beyond our thought and conception †, as any thing in that of religion. For, will any man in his ſenſes ſay, that it is leſs difficult to conceive, how the world came to be and to continue as it is, without, than with, an intelligent Author and Governor of it? or, admitting an intelligent Governor of it, that there is ſome other rule of government, more natural, and of eaſier conception, than that, which we call moral? Indeed, without an intelligent Author and Governor of nature, no account at all can be given, how this univerſe, or

* Pag. 149, &c. † See Part II. Ch. ii.

the part of it particularly in which we are concerned, came to be, and the courſe of it to be carried on, as it is: Nor any, of its general end and de[illegible]n, without a moral Governor of it. That there is an intelligent Author of nature, and natural Governor of the world, is a principle gone upon in the foregoing treatiſe, as proved, and generally known and confeſſed to be proved. And the very notion of an intelligent Author of nature proved by particular final cauſes, implies a will and a character*. Now, as our whole nature, the nature which He has given us, leads us to conclude His will and character to be moral, juſt, and good: ſo we can ſcarce in imagination conceive, what it can be otherwiſe. However, in conſequence of this his will and character, whatever it be, he formed the univerſe as it is, and carries on the courſe of it as he does, rather than in any other manner; and has aſſigned to us, and to all living creatures, a part and a lot in it. Irrational creatures act this their part, and enjoy and undergo the pleaſures and the pains allotted them, without any reflection. But one would think it impoſſible, that creatures endued with reaſon could avoid reflecting ſometimes upon all this: reflecting, if not from whence we came, yet, at leaſt, whither we are going, and what the myſterious ſcheme, in the midſt of which we find ourſelves, will, at length, come out, and produce: a ſcheme in which it is certain we are highly intereſted, and in which we may be intereſted even beyond conception. For

* Pag. 135, 136.

many things prove it palpably abſurd to conclude, that we ſhall ceaſe to be, at death. Particular analogies do moſt ſenſibly ſhew us, that there is nothing to be thought ſtrange, in our being to exiſt in another ſtate of life. And that we are now living beings, affords a ſtrong probability, that we ſhall *continue* ſo; unleſs there be ſome poſitive ground, and there is none from reaſon or analogy, to think death will deſtroy us. Were a perſuaſion of this kind ever ſo well grounded, there would, ſurely, be little reaſon to take pleaſure in it. But indeed it can have no other ground, than ſome ſuch imagination, as that of our groſs bodies being Ourſelves: which is contrary to experience. Experience too moſt clearly ſhews us the folly of concluding, from the body and the living agent affecting each other mutually, that the diſſolution of the former is the deſtruction of the latter. And there are remarkable inſtances of their not affecting each other, which lead us to a contrary concluſion. The ſuppoſition then, which in all reaſon we are to go upon, is, that our living nature will *continue* after death. And it is infinitely unreaſonable to form an inſtitution of life, or to act, upon any other ſuppoſition. Now all expectation of immortality, whether more or leſs certain, opens an unbounded proſpect to our hopes and our fears: ſince we ſee the conſtitution of nature is ſuch, as to admit of miſery as well as to be productive of happineſs, and experience ourſelves to partake of both in ſome degree; and ſince we cannot but know, what higher degrees of both we are capable of.

And there is no preſumption againſt believing farther, that our future intereſt depends upon our preſent behaviour: For we ſee our preſent intereſt doth; and that the happineſs and miſery, which are naturally annexed to our actions, very frequently do not follow, till long after the actions are done, to which they are reſpectively annexed. So that were ſpeculation to leave us uncertain, whether it were likely, that the Author of nature, in giving happineſs and miſery to his creatures, hath regard to their actions or not: yet, ſince we find by experience that he hath ſuch regard, the whole ſenſe of things which he hath given us, plainly leads us at once, and without any elaborate enquiries, to think, that it may, indeed muſt, be to good actions chiefly that he hath annexed happineſs, and to bad actions miſery; or that he will, upon the whole, reward thoſe who do well, and puniſh thoſe who do evil. To confirm this from the conſtitution of the world, it has been obſerved; That ſome ſort of moral government is neceſſarily implied in that natural government of God, which we experience ourſelves under: that good and bad actions, at preſent, are naturally rewarded and puniſhed, not only as beneficial and miſchievous to ſociety: but alſo as virtuous and vitious: and that there is, in the very nature of the thing, a tendency to their being rewarded and puniſhed in a much higher degree, than they are at preſent. And though this higher degree of diſtributive juſtice, which Nature thus points out and leads towards, is prevented for a time from taking place: it is by obſtacles, which the ſtate of this world unhappily throws in its way,

and which therefore are in their nature temporary. Now, as theſe things in the natural conduct of Providence, are obſervable on the ſide of virtue; ſo there is nothing to be ſet againſt them, on the ſide of vice. A moral ſcheme of government then, is viſibly eſtabliſhed, and, in ſome degree, carried into execution: And this, together with the eſſential tendencies of virtue and vice duly conſidered, naturally raiſe in us an apprehenſion, that it will be carried on farther towards perfection, in a future ſtate, and that every one ſhall there receive according to his deſerts. And if this be ſo, then our future and general intereſt, under the moral government of God, is appointed to depend upon our behaviour; notwithſtanding the difficulty, which this may occaſion, of ſecuring it, and the danger of loſing it: juſt in the ſame manner as our temporal intereſt, under his natural government, is appointed to depend upon our behaviour; notwithſtanding the like difficulty and danger. For, from our original conſtitution and That of the world which we inhabit, we are naturally truſted with ourſelves; with our own conduct and our own intereſt. And from the ſame conſtitution of nature, eſpecially joined with that courſe of things which is owing to men, we have temptations to be unfaithful in this truſt; to forfeit this intereſt, to neglect it, and run ourſelves into miſery and ruin. From theſe temptations ariſe, the difficulties of behaving ſo as to ſecure our temporal intereſt, and the hazard of behaving ſo as to miſcarry in it. There is therefore nothing incredible in ſuppoſing there may be the like difficulty and hazard with regard to that

chief and final good, which religion lays before us. Indeed the whole account, how it came to paſs, that we were placed in ſuch a condition as this; muſt be beyond our comprehenſion. But it is in part accounted for by what religion teaches us, that the character of virtue and piety muſt be a neceſſary qualification for a future ſtate of ſecurity and happineſs, under the moral government of God; in like manner, as ſome certain qualifications or other are neceſſary for every particular condition of life, under his natural government: And that the preſent ſtate was intended to be a ſchool of diſcipline, for improving in ourſelves that character. Now this intention of Nature is rendered highly credible by obſerving; that we are plainly made for improvement of all kinds: that it is a general appointment of providence, that we cultivate practical principles, and form within ourſelves habits of action, in order to become fit for, what we were wholly unfit for before: that in particular, childhood and youth is naturally appointed to be a ſtate of diſcipline for mature age: and that the preſent world is peculiarly fitted for a ſtate of moral diſcipline. And, whereas objections are urged againſt the whole notion of moral government and a probation-ſtate, from the opinion of Neceſſity; it has been ſhewn, that God has given us the evidence, as it were, of experience, that all objections againſt religion, on this head, are vain and deluſive. He has alſo, in his natural government ſuggeſted an anſwer to all our ſhort-ſighted objections, againſt the equity and goodneſs of his moral government: And

in general He has exemplified to us the latter by the former.

These things, which, it is to be remembred, are matters of fact, ought, in all common ſenſe, to awaken mankind; to induce them to conſider in earneſt their condition, and what they have to do. It is abſurd, abſurd to the degree of being ridiculous, if the ſubject were not of ſo ſerious a kind, for men to think themſelves ſecure, in a vicious life; or even in that immoral thoughtleſſneſs, which far the greateſt part of them are fallen into. And the credibility of religion, ariſing from experience and facts here conſidered, is fully ſufficient, in reaſon, to engage them to live in the general practice of all virtue and piety; under the ſerious apprehenſion, though it ſhould be mixed with ſome doubt *, of a righteous adminiſtration eſtabliſhed in nature, and a future judgment in conſequence of it: Eſpecially when we conſider, how very queſtionable it is, whether any thing at all can be gained by vice †; how unqueſtionably little, as well as precarious, the pleaſures and profits of it are at the beſt; and how ſoon they muſt be parted with at the longeſt. For, in the deliberations of reaſon, concerning what we are to purſue, and what to avoid, as temptations to any thing from mere paſſion, are ſuppoſed out of the caſe: So inducements to vice, from cool expectations of pleaſure and intereſt ſo ſmall and uncertain and ſhort, are really ſo inſignificant, as, in the view of reaſon,

* Part II. Chap. vi. † Pag 57, 58.

to be almoſt nothing in themſelves: And in compariſon with the importance of religion, they quite diſappear and are loſt. Mere paſſion indeed may be alledged, though not as a reaſon, yet as an excuſe, for a vicious courſe of life. And how ſorry an excuſe it is, will be manifeſt by obſerving, that we are placed in a condition, in which we are unavoidably inured to govern our paſſions, by being neceſſitated to govern them; and to lay ourſelves under the ſame kind of reſtraints, and as great ones too, from temporal regards, as virtue and piety, in the ordinary courſe of things, require. The plea of ungovernable paſſion then, on the ſide of vice, is the pooreſt of all things: For it is no reaſon, and but a poor excuſe. But the proper motives to religion, are the proper proofs of it, from our moral nature, from the preſages of conſcience, and our natural apprehenſion of God under the character of a righteous governor and judge; a nature and conſcience and apprehenſion given us by Him: and from the confirmation of the dictates of reaſon, by *Life and immortality brought to light by the goſpel; and the wrath of God revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men.*

The end of the firſt PART.

THE ANALOGY OF RELIGION TO THE Conſtitution and Courſe of NATURE.

PART II.

Of REVEALED RELIGION.

CHAP. I.

Of the Importance of Chriſtianity.

SOME perſons, upon pretence of the ſufficiency of the light of Nature, avowedly reject all Revelation, as, in its very notion, incredible, and what muſt be fictitious. And indeed it is certain, no Revelation would have been given, had the light of Nature been ſufficient in ſuch a ſenſe, as to render one not wanting and uſeleſs. But no man, in ſeriouſneſs

and ſimplicity of mind, can poſſibly think it ſo, who conſiders the ſtate of religion in the heathen world, before Revelation, and its preſent ſtate in thoſe places which have borrowed no light from it: particularly, the doubtfulneſs of ſome of the greateſt men, concerning things of the utmoſt importance, as well as the natural inattention and ignorance of mankind in general. It is impoſſible to ſay, who would have been able to have reaſoned out that whole ſyſtem, which we call Natural Religion, in its genuine ſimplicity, clear of ſuperſtition: but there is certainly no ground to affirm, that the Generality could. If they could, there is no ſort of probability, that they would. Admitting there were, they would highly want a ſtanding admonition, to remind them of it, and inculcate it upon them. And farther ſtill, were they as much diſpoſed to attend to Religion, as the better ſort of men are: yet even upon this ſuppoſition, there would be various occaſions for ſupernatural inſtruction and aſſiſtance, and the greateſt advantages might be afforded by them. So that to ſay, Revelation is a thing ſuperfluous, what there was no need of, and what can be of no ſervice; is, I think, to talk quite wildly and at random. Nor would it be more extravagant to affirm, that mankind is ſo entirely at eaſe in the preſent ſtate, and life ſo compleatly happy; that it is a contradiction to ſuppoſe our condition capable of being, in any reſpect, better.

THERE are other perſons, not to be ranked with theſe, who ſeem to be getting into a way of neglecting, and, as it were, overlooking Revelation, as of

ſmall importance, provided Natural Religion be kept to. With little regard, either to the evidence of the former, or to the objections againſt it, and even upon ſuppoſition of its truth; "the only deſign "of it," ſay they, "muſt be, to eſtabliſh a belief "of the moral ſyſtem of nature, and to enforce "the practice of natural piety and virtue. The "belief and practice of theſe things were, per-"haps, much promoted by the firſt publication of "Chriſtianity: But whether they are believed and "practiſed, upon the evidence and motives of Na-"ture or of Revelation, is no great matter *". This way of conſidering Revelation, though it is not the ſame with the former, yet borders nearly upon it, and very much, at length, runs up into it: and requires to be particularly conſidered, with regard to the perſons, who ſeem to be getting into this way. The conſideration of it will likewiſe farther ſhew the extravagance of the former opinion, and the truth of the obſervations in anſwer to it, juſt mentioned. And an inquiry into the Importance of Chriſtianity, cannot be an improper introduction to a treatiſe concerning the Credibility of it.

Now if God has given a Revelation to mankind, and commanded thoſe things, which are command-

* Invenis multos——propterea nolle fieri Chriſtianos, quia quaſi ſufficiunt ſibi de bona vita ſua. Bene vivere opus eſt, ait. Quid mihi praecepturus eſt Chriſtus? Ut bene vivam? Jam bene vivo. Quid mihi neceſſarius eſt Chriſtus? Nullum homicidium, nullum furtum, nullam rapinam facio, res alienas non concupiſco, nullo adulterio contaminor. Nam inveniatur in vita mea aliquid quod reprehendatur, et qui reprehenderit faciat Chriſtianum. *Aug. in Pſal.* xxxi.

ed in Chriſtianity; it is evident, at firſt ſight, that it cannot in any wiſe be an indifferent matter, whether we obey or diſobey thoſe commands: unleſs we are certainly aſſured, that we know all the reaſons for them, and that all thoſe reaſons are now ceaſed, with regard to mankind in general, or to ourſelves in particular. And it is abſolutely impoſſible, we can be aſſured of this. For our ignorance of theſe reaſons proves nothing in the caſe: ſince the whole Analogy of Nature ſhews, what is indeed in itſelf evident, that there may be infinite reaſons for things, with which we are not acquainted.

But the Importance of Chriſtianity will more diſtinctly appear, by conſidering it more diſtinctly: *Firſt*, as a republication, and external inſtitution, of Natural or Eſſential Religion, adapted to the preſent circumſtances of mankind, and intended to promote natural piety and virtue: And *Secondly*, as containing an account of a diſpenſation of things, not diſcoverable by reaſon, in conſequence of which, ſeveral diſtinct precepts are enjoined us. For though Natural Religion is the foundation and principal part of Chriſtianity, it is not in any ſenſe the whole of it.

I. Christianity is a republication of Natural Religion. It inſtructs mankind in the moral ſyſtem of the world: that it is the work of an infinitely perfect Being, and under his government; that virtue is his law; and that He will finally judge mankind in righteouſneſs, and render to all according to their works, in a future ſtate. And, which is very material, it teaches Natural Religion, in its genuine ſimplicity; free from thoſe ſuperſtitions, with which

it was totally corrupted, and under which it was in a manner loſt.

6 REVELATION is farther, an authoritative publication of Natural Religion, and ſo affords the evidence of teſtimony for the truth of it. Indeed the miracles and prophecies recorded in Scripture, were intended to prove a particular diſpenſation of Providence, the redemption of the world by the Meſſiah: But this does not hinder, but that they may alſo prove God's general providence over the world, as our moral governor and judge. And they evidently do prove it; becauſe this character of the Author of Nature, is neceſſarily connected with and implied in that particular revealed diſpenſation of things: it is likewiſe continually taught expreſſly, and inſiſted upon, by thoſe perſons, who wrought the miracles and delivered the prophecies. So that indeed Natural Religion ſeems as much proved by the ſcripture revelation, as it would have been, had the deſign of Revelation been nothing elſe than to prove it.

7 BUT it may poſſibly be diſputed, how far miracles can prove Natural Religion; and notable objections may be urged againſt this proof of it, conſidered as a matter of ſpeculation: but conſidered as a practical thing, there can be none. For ſuppoſe a perſon to teach Natural Religion to a nation, who had lived in total ignorance or forgetfulneſs of it; and to declare he was commiſſioned by God ſo to do: Suppoſe him, in proof of his commiſſion, to foretel things future, which no human foreſight could have gueſſed at; to divide the ſea with a word; feed great

multitudes with bread from heaven; cure all manner of diſeaſes; and raiſe the dead, even Himſelf, to life: Would not this give additional credibility to his teaching, a credibility beyond what that of a common man would have; and be an authoritative publication of the Law of Nature, *i. e.* a new proof of it? It would be a practical one, of the ſtrongeſt kind, perhaps, which human creatures are capable of having given them. The law of Moſes then, and the goſpel of Chriſt, are authoritative publications of the Religion of Nature: They afford a proof of God's general providence, as moral governor of the world; as well as of his particular diſpenſations of Providence towards ſinful creatures, revealed in the Law and the Goſpel. As they are the only evidence of the latter; ſo they are an additional evidence of the former.

§ To ſhew this further, let us ſuppoſe a man of the greateſt and moſt improved capacity, who had never heard of Revelation, convinced upon the whole, notwithſtanding the diſorders of the world, that it was under the direction and moral government of an infinitely perfect Being; but ready to queſtion, whether he were not got beyond the reach of his faculties: Suppoſe him brought, by this ſuſpicion, into great danger of being carried away by the univerſal bad example of almoſt every one around him, who appeared to have no ſenſe, no practical ſenſe at leaſt, of theſe things: And this, perhaps, would be as advantageous a ſituation with regard to religion, as Nature alone ever placed any man in. What a confirmation now

muſt it be to ſuch a perſon, all at once, to find, that this moral ſyſtem of things was revealed to mankind, in the name of that infinite Being, whom he had from principles of reaſon believed in; and that the publiſhers of the Revelation proved their commiſſion from Him, by making it appear, that he had intruſted them with a power of ſuſpending and changing the general laws of nature.

NOR muſt it by any means be omitted, for it is a thing of the utmoſt importance, That life and immortality are eminently brought to light by the goſpel. The great doctrines of a future ſtate, the danger of a courſe of wickedneſs, and the efficacy of repentance, are not only confirmed in the goſpel, but are taught, eſpecially the laſt is, with a degree of light, to which that of Nature is but darkneſs.

FARTHER: As Chriſtianity ſerved theſe ends and purpoſes, when it was firſt publiſhed, by the miraculous publication itſelf; ſo it was intended to ſerve the ſame purpoſes, in future ages, by means of the ſettlement of a viſible church: of a ſociety, diſtinguiſhed from common ones, and from the reſt of the world, by peculiar religious inſtitutions; by an inſtituted method of inſtruction, and an inſtituted form of external religion. Miraculous powers were given to the firſt preachers of Chriſtianity, in order to their introducing it into the world: A viſible church was eſtabliſhed, in order to continue it, and carry it on ſucceſſively throughout all ages. Had Moſes and the prophets, Chriſt and his apoſtles,

only taught, and by miracles proved, religion to their contemporaries; the benefits of their inſtructions would have reached but a ſmall part of mankind. Chriſtianity muſt have been, in a great degree, ſunk and forgot in a very few ages. To prevent this, appears to have been one reaſon, why a viſible church was inſtituted: to be, like a city upon a hill, a ſtanding memorial to the world of the duty which we owe our Maker: to call men continually, both by example and inſtruction, to attend to it; and by the form of religion ever before their eyes, remind them of the reality: to be the repoſitory of the oracles of God: to hold up the light of Revelation in aid to that of Nature, and propagate it throughout all generations to the end of the world——— The light of Revelation, conſidered here in no other view, than as deſigned to enforce Natural Religion. And in proportion as Chriſtianity is profeſſed and taught in the world, religion, natural or eſſential religion, is thus diſtinctly and advantageouſly laid before mankind; and brought again and again to their thoughts, as a matter of infinite importance. A viſible church has alſo a farther tendency to promote Natural Religion, as being an inſtituted method of education, originally intended to be of more peculiar advantage to thoſe who would conform to it. For one end of the inſtitution was, that by admonition and reproof, as well as inſtruction; by a general regular diſcipline, and public exerciſes of religion; *the body of Chriſt*, as the Scripture ſpeaks, ſhould *be edified*, *i. e.* trained up in piety and virtue, for a higher and better ſtate. This ſettlement then appearing thus beneficial; tending in the nature of

the thing to anſwer, and in ſome degree actually anſwering, thoſe ends; it is to be remembred, that the very notion of it implies poſitive inſtitutions: for the viſibility of the church conſiſts in them. Take away every thing of this kind, and you loſe the very notion itſelf. So that if the things now mentioned are advantages, the reaſon and importance of poſitive inſtitutions in general, is moſt obvious; ſince without them, theſe advantages could not be ſecured to the world. And it is mere idle wantonneſs, to inſiſt upon knowing the reaſons, why ſuch particular ones were fixt upon, rather than others.

11 THE benefit ariſing from this ſupernatural aſſiſtance, which Chriſtianity affords to Natural Religion, is what ſome perſons are very ſlow in apprehending. And yet it is a thing diſtinct in itſelf, and a very plain obvious one. For will any in good earneſt really ſay, that the bulk of mankind in the heathen world, were in as advantageous a ſituation, with regard to Natural Religion, as they are now amongſt us: That it was laid before them, and enforced upon them, in a manner as diſtinct, and as much tending to influence their practice?

12 THE objections againſt all this, from the perverſion of Chriſtianity, and from the ſuppoſition of its having had but little good influence, however innocently they may be propoſed, yet cannot be inſiſted upon, as concluſive, upon any principles, but ſuch as lead to downright Atheiſm: Becauſe the manifeſtation of the Law of Nature by reaſon, which, upon all principles of Theiſm, muſt have been from

God, has been perverted and rendered ineffectual in the ſame manner. It may indeed, I think, truly be ſaid, that the good effects of Chriſtianity has not been ſmall: nor its ſuppoſed ill effects, any effects at all of it, properly ſpeaking. Perhaps too the things themſelves done, have been aggravated: And if not, Chriſtianity hath been often only a pretence: and the ſame evils in the main would have been done, upon ſome other pretence. However, great and ſhocking as the corruptions and abuſes of it have really been, they cannot be inſiſted upon as arguments againſt it, upon principles of Theiſm. For one cannot proceed one ſtep in reaſoning upon Natural Religion, any more than upon Chriſtianity, without laying it down as a firſt principle, that the diſpenſations of Providence are not to be judged of by their perverſions, but by their genuine tendencies: not by what they do actually ſeem to effect, but by what they would effect if mankind did their part; That part which is juſtly put and left upon them. It is altogether as much the language of one, as of the other; *He that is unjuſt, let him be unjuſt ſtill: and he that is holy, let him be holy ſtill* *. The light of Reaſon does not, any more than that of Revelation, force men to ſubmit to its authority: Both admoniſh them of what they ought to do and avoid, together with the conſequences of each; and after this, leave them at full liberty to act juſt as they pleaſe, till the appointed time of judgment. Every moment's experience ſhews, that this is God's general rule of government.

* Rev. xxii. 11.

To return then: Chriſtianity being a promulgation of the Law of Nature; being moreover an authoritative promulgation of it; with new light, and other circumſtances of peculiar advantage, adapted to the wants of mankind; theſe things fully ſhew its Importance. And it is to be obſerved farther, that, as the nature of the caſe requires, ſo all Chriſtians are commanded to contribute, by their profeſſion of Chriſtianity, to preſerve it in the world, and render it ſuch a promulgation and enforcement of religion. For it is the very ſcheme of the Goſpel, that each Chriſtian ſhould, in his degree, contribute towards continuing and carrying it on: all by uniting in the public profeſſion and external practice of Chriſtianity; ſome by inſtructing, by having the overſight and taking care of this religious community, the church of God. Now this farther ſhews the Importance of Chriſtianity; and, which is what I chiefly intend, its Importance in a practical ſenſe: or the high obligations we are under, to take it into our moſt ſerious conſideration; and the danger there muſt neceſſarily be, not only in treating it deſpitefully, which I am not now ſpeaking of, but in diſregarding and neglecting it. For this is neglecting to do what is expreſsly injoined us, for continuing thoſe benefits to the world, and tranſmitting them down to future times. And all this holds, even though the only thing to be conſidered in Chriſtianity, were its ſubſerviency to Natural Religion. But,

II. CHRISTIANITY is to be conſidered in a further view: as containing an account of a diſpenſation of

things, not at all diſcoverable by reaſon, in conſequence of which ſeveral diſtinct precepts are injoined us. Chriſtianity is not only an external inſtitution of Natural Religion, and a new promulgation of God's general providence, as righteous governor and judge of the world; but it contains alſo a Revelation of a particular diſpenſation of providence, carrying on by his Son and Spirit, for the recovery and ſalvation of mankind, who are repreſented, in Scripture, to be in a ſtate of ruin. And in conſequence of this Revelation being made, we are commanded *to be baptized*, not only *in the name of the Father*, but alſo, *of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt*: and other obligations of duty, unknown before, to the Son and the holy Ghoſt, are revealed. Now the importance of theſe duties may be judged of, by obſerving that they ariſe, not from poſitive command merely; but alſo from the offices, which appear, from Scripture, to belong to thoſe Divine perſons in the goſpel diſpenſation; or from the relations, which, we are there informed, they ſtand in to us. By Reaſon is revealed the relation, which God the Father ſtands in to us. Hence ariſes the obligation of duty, which we are under to Him. In Scripture are revealed the relations which the Son and Holy Spirit ſtand in to us. Hence ariſe the obligations of duty which we are under to them. The truth of the caſe, as one may ſpeak, in each of theſe three reſpects being admitted: that God is the Governor of the world, upon the evidence of Reaſon; that Chriſt is the Mediator between God and Man, and the Holy Ghoſt our Guide and Sanctifier, upon the evidence of Revelation: the truth of the

caſe, I ſay, in each of theſe reſpects being admitted; it is no more a queſtion, why it ſhould be commanded, that we be baptized in the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghoſt, than that we be baptized in the name of the Father. This matter ſeems to require to be more fully ſtated*.

15 LET it be remembred then, that religion comes under the twofold conſideration of internal and external: for the latter is as real a part of religion, of true Religion, as the former. Now when religion is conſidered under the firſt notion, as an inward principle, to be exerted in ſuch and ſuch inward acts of the mind and heart; the eſſence of Natural Religion may be ſaid to conſiſt in religious regards to *God the Father Almighty*: and the eſſence of Revealed Religion, as diſtinguiſhed from natural, to conſiſt in religious regards to *the Son*, and to *the Holy Ghoſt*. And the obligation we are under, of paying theſe religious regards to each of theſe Divine Perſons reſpectively, ariſes from the reſpective relations, which they each ſtand in to us. How theſe relations are made known, whether by Reaſon or Revelation, makes no alteration in the caſe: becauſe the duties ariſe out of the relations themſelves, not out of the manner in which we are informed of them. The Son and Spirit have each his proper Office, in that great diſpenſation of Providence, the redemption of the world: the one our Mediator, the other our Sanctifier. Does not then the duty

* See, The Nature, Obligation, and Efficacy, of the Chriſtian ſacraments, &c. and Colliber Of Revealed Religion, as there quoted

of religious regards to both theſe Divine Perſons, as immediately ariſe, to the view of reaſon, out of the very nature of theſe offices and relations; as the inward good-will and kind intention, which we owe to our fellow-creatures, ariſes out of the common relations between us and them? But it will be aſked, "What are the inward religious regards, appear-"ing thus obviouſly due to the Son and holy Spirit; "as ariſing, not merely from command in Scrip-"ture, but from the very nature of the revealed "relations, which they ſtand in to us?" I anſwer, the religious regards of reverence, honour, love, truſt, gratitude, fear, hope. In what external manner, this inward worſhip is to be expreſſed, is a matter of pure revealed command; as perhaps the external manner, in which God the Father is to be worſhipped, may be more ſo, than we are ready to think: But the worſhip, the internal worſhip itſelf, to the Son and Holy Ghoſt, is no farther matter of pure revealed command, than as the relations they ſtand in to us are matter of pure revelation: for the relations being known, the obligations to ſuch internal worſhip are obligations of reaſon, ariſing out of thoſe relations themſelves. In ſhort, the hiſtory of the Goſpel as immediately ſhews us the reaſon of theſe obligations, as it ſhews us the meaning of the words, Son and Holy Ghoſt.

IF this account of the Chriſtian Religion be juſt; thoſe perſons who can ſpeak lightly of it, as of little conſequence, provided Natural Religion be kept to, plainly forget, that Chriſtianity, even what is peculiarly ſo called, as diſtinguiſhed from Natural Reli-

gion, has yet ſomewhat very important, even of a moral nature. For the office of our Lord being made known, and the relation he ſtands in to us, the obligation of religious regards to Him, is plainly moral; as much as Charity to Mankind is; ſince this obligation ariſes, before external command, immediately out of That his office and relation itſelf. Thoſe perſons appear to forget, that Revelation is to be conſidered, as informing us of ſomewhat New, in the ſtate of mankind, and in the government of the world: as acquainting us with ſome relations we ſtand in, which could not otherwiſe have been known. And theſe relations being real, (though before Revelation we could be under no obligations from them, yet upon their being revealed,) there is no reaſon to think, but that neglect of behaving ſuitably to them, will be attended with the ſame kind of conſequences under God's government; as neglecting to behave ſuitably to any other relations made known to us by Reaſon. And ignorance, whether unavoidable or voluntary; ſo far as we can poſſibly ſee, will, juſt as much, and juſt as little, excuſe in one caſe as in the other: the ignorance being ſuppoſed equally unavoidable, or equally voluntary, in both caſes.

IF therefore Chriſt be indeed the Mediator between God and man, *i. e.* if Chriſtianity be true; if he be indeed our Lord, our Saviour, and our God; No one can ſay, what may follow, not only the obſtinate, but the careleſs diſregard to him, in thoſe high relations. Nay no one can ſay, what

may follow ſuch diſregard, even in the way of natural conſequence*. For, as the natural conſequences of vice in this life, are doubtleſs to be conſidered, as judicial puniſhments inflicted by God; ſo likewiſe, for aught we know, the judicial puniſhments of the future life may be, in a like way or a like ſenſe, the natural conſequence of vice†: of men's violating or diſregarding the relations, which God has placed them in here, and made known to them.

Again: If Mankind are corrupted and depraved in their moral character, and ſo are unfit for that ſtate, which Chriſt is gone to prepare for his diſciples; and if the aſſiſtance of God's Spirit be neceſſary to renew their nature, in the degree requiſite to their being qualified for That ſtate; all which is implied in the expreſs, though figurative declaration *Except a Man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God* ‡: Suppoſing this, is it poſſible any ſerious perſon can think it a ſlight matter, whether or no he makes uſe of the means, expreſsly commanded by God, for obtaining this divine aſſiſtance? eſpecially ſince the whole Analogy of Nature ſhews, that we are not to expect any benefits, without making uſe of the appointed means for obtaining or injoying them. Now Reaſon ſhews us nothing, of the particular immediate means of obtaining, either temporal or ſpiritual benefits. This therefore we muſt learn, either from Experience or Revelation. And experience, the preſent caſe does not admit of.

* Pag. 36, 37. † Ch. v. ‡ John iii. 5.

THE concluſion from all this evidently is; that, Chriſtianity being ſuppoſed either true or credible, it is unſpeakable irreverence, and really the moſt preſumptuous raſhneſs, to treat it as a light matter. It can never juſtly be eſteemed of little conſequence, till it be poſitively ſuppoſed falſe. Nor do I know a higher and more important obligation which we are under, than That, of examining moſt ſeriouſly into the Evidence of it, ſuppoſing its Credibility; and of embracing it, upon ſuppoſition of its Truth.

THE two following deductions may be proper to be added, in order to illuſtrate the foregoing obſervations, and to prevent their being miſtaken.

Firſt, HENCE we may clearly ſee, where lies the diſtinction between what is poſitive and what is moral in religion. Moral *Precepts* are precepts, the reaſons of which we ſee: poſitive *Precepts* are precepts, the reaſons of which we do not ſee *. Moral *Duties* ariſe out of the nature of the caſe itſelf, prior to external command. Poſitive *Duties* do not ariſe out of the nature of the caſe; but from external command: Nor would they be duties at all, were it not for ſuch command, received from Him whoſe Creatures and Subjects we are. But the manner

* This is the diſtinction between moral and poſitive precepts, conſidered reſpectively as ſuch. But yet, ſince the latter have ſomewhat of a moral nature, we may ſee the reaſon of them, conſidered in this view. Moral and poſitive precepts are, in ſome reſpects alike, in other reſpects different. So far as they are alike, we diſcern the reaſons of both: ſo far as they are different, we diſcern the reaſons of the former, but not of the latter. See pag. 177, &c. and pag. 188, 189.

in which the nature of the caſe, or the fact of the relation, is made known, this doth not denominate any duty either poſitive or moral. That we be baptized in the name of the Father, is as much a poſitive duty, as that we be baptized in the name of the Son; becauſe both ariſe equally from revealed command: though the relation which we ſtand in to God the Father, is made known to us by Reaſon; the relation we ſtand in to Chriſt, by Revelation only. On the other hand, the diſpenſation of the Goſpel admitted, gratitude as immediately becomes due to Chriſt, from his being the voluntary miniſter of this diſpenſation; as it is due to God the Father, from his being the fountain of all good: though the firſt is made known to us, by Revelation only; the ſecond, by Reaſon. Hence alſo we may ſee, and, for diſtinctneſs ſake, it may be worth mentioning, that poſitive inſtitutions come under a two-fold conſideration. They are either inſtitutions founded on Natural Religion, as Baptiſm in the name of the Father; though this has alſo a particular reference to the Goſpel-diſpenſation, for it is in the name of God, as the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt: Or they are external inſtitutions founded on Revealed Religion; as Baptiſm in the Name of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt.

Secondly, From the diſtinction between what is moral and what is poſitive in Religion, appears the ground of That peculiar preference, which the Scripture teaches us to be due to the former.

The reaſon of poſitive inſtitutions in general, is very obvious: though we ſhould not ſee the reaſon,

why ſuch particular ones are pitched upon, rather than others. Whoever therefore, inſtead of cavilling at words, will attend to the thing itſelf, may clearly ſee, that poſitive inſtitutions in general, as diſtinguiſhed from this or that particular one, have the nature of moral commands: ſince the reaſons of them appear. Thus, for inſtance, the *external* worſhip of God is a moral duty, though no particular mode of it be ſo. Care then is to be taken, when a compariſon is made between poſitive and moral duties, that they be compared, no farther than as they are different: no farther than as the former are poſitive, or ariſe out of mere external command, the reaſons of which we are not acquainted with; and as the latter are moral, or ariſe out of the apparent reaſon of the caſe, without ſuch external command. Unleſs this caution be obſerved, we ſhall run into endleſs confuſion.

Now this being premiſed, ſuppoſe two ſtanding precepts injoined by the ſame authority; that, in certain conjunctures, it is impoſſible to obey both; that the former is moral, *i. e.* a precept of which we ſee the reaſons, and that they hold in the particular caſe before us; but that the latter is poſitive, *i. e.* a precept of which we do not ſee the reaſons: it is indiſputable that our obligations are to obey the former; becauſe there is an apparent reaſon for this preference, and none againſt it. Farther, poſitive inſtitutions, I ſuppoſe all thoſe which Chriſtianity injoins, are means to a moral end: and the end muſt be acknowledged more excellent, than the means. Nor is obſervance of theſe inſtitutions any religious

obedience at all, or of any value, otherwiſe than as it proceeds from a moral principle. This ſeems to be the ſtrict, logical way of ſtating and determining this matter: but will, perhaps, be found leſs applicable to practice, than may be thought at firſt ſight.

And therefore, in a more practical, though more lax way of conſideration, and taking the words, *moral Law* and poſitive *Inſtitutions*, in the popular ſenſe; I add, that the whole moral Law is as much matter of revealed command, as poſitive inſtitutions are: for the Scripture injoins every moral virtue. In this reſpect then they are both upon a level. But the moral Law is, moreover, written upon our hearts; interwoven into our very nature. And this is a plain intimation of the Author of it, which is to be preferred, when they interfere.

But there is not altogether ſo much neceſſity for the determination of this queſtion, as ſome perſons ſeem to think. Nor are we left to Reaſon alone to determine it. For, *Firſt*, Though mankind have, in all ages, been greatly prone to place their religion in peculiar poſitive rites, by way of equivalent for obedience to moral precepts; yet, without making any compariſon at all between them, and conſequently without determining which is to have the preference, the nature of the thing abundantly ſhews all notions of that kind to be utterly ſubverſive of true religion: as they are, moreover, contrary to the whole general tenor of Scripture; and likewiſe to the moſt expreſs particular declarations of it, that nothing can render us accepted of God, without

moral virtue. *Secondly*, Upon the occaſion of mentioning together poſitive and moral duties, the Scripture always puts the ſtreſs of religion upon the latter, and never upon the former: which, though no ſort of allowance to neglect the former, when they do not interfere with the latter, yet is a plain intimation, that when they do, the latter are to be preferred. And farther, as mankind are for placing the ſtreſs of their religion any where, rather than upon virtue; leſt both the reaſon of the thing, and the general ſpirit of Chriſtianity, appearing in the intimation now mentioned, ſhould be ineffectual againſt this prevalent folly: Our Lord himſelf, from whoſe command alone the obligation of poſitive inſtitutions ariſes, has taken occaſion to make the compariſon between them and moral precepts; when the Phariſees cenſured him, for *eating with publicans and ſinners*; and alſo when they cenſured his diſciples, for *plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath-day*. Upon this compariſon, he has determined expreſsly, and in form, which ſhall have the preference when they interfere. And by delivering his authoritative determination in a proverbial manner of expreſſion, he has made it general: *I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice* *. The propriety of the word, *proverbial*, is not the thing inſiſted upon: though I think the manner of ſpeaking is to be called ſo. But that the manner of ſpeaking very remarkably renders the determination general, is ſurely indiſputable. For, had it, in the latter caſe, been ſaid only, that God preferred mercy to the rigid ob-

* Matth. ix. 13. and xii. 7.

ſervance of the ſabbath; even then, by parity of reaſon, moſt juſtly might we have argued, that he preferred mercy likewiſe, to the obſervance of other ritual inſtitutions; and in general, moral duties, to poſitive ones. And thus the determination would have been general; though its being ſo, were inferred and not expreſſed. But as the paſſage really ſtands in the Goſpel, it is much ſtronger. For the ſenſe and the very literal words of our Lord's anſwer, are as applicable to any other inſtance of a compariſon, between poſitive and moral duties, as to This upon which they were ſpoken. And if, in caſe of competition, mercy is to be preferred to poſitive inſtitutions, it will ſcarce be thought, that juſtice is to give place to them. It is remarkable too, that, as the words are a quotation from the Old Teſtament, they are introduced, on both the forementioned occaſions, with a declaration, that the Phariſees did not underſtand the meaning of them. This, I ſay, is very remarkable. For, ſince it is ſcarce poſſible, for the moſt ignorant perſon, not to underſtand the literal ſenſe of the paſſage, in the Prophet *; and ſince underſtanding the literal ſenſe would not have prevented Their *condemning the guiltleſs* †; it can hardly be doubted, that the thing which our Lord really intended in That declaration, was, that the Phariſees had not learnt from it, as they might, wherein the *general* ſpirit of religion conſiſts: that it conſiſts in moral piety and virtue, as diſtinguiſhed from forms, and ritual obſervances. However, it is certain we may

* Hoſ. vi. † See Matth. xii 7.

learn this from his divine application of the paſſage, in the goſpel.

BUT, as it is one of the peculiar weakneſſes of human Nature, when, upon a compariſon of two things, one is found to be of greater importance than the other, to conſider this other as of ſcarce any importance at all: it is highly neceſſary that we remind ourſelves, how great preſumption it is, to make light of any inſtitutions of Divine appointment; that our obligations to obey all God's commands whatever, are abſolute and indiſpenſable; And that commands merely poſitive, admitted to be from Him, lay us under a moral obligation to obey them: an obligation moral in the ſtricteſt and moſt proper ſenſe.

To theſe things I cannot forbear adding, that the account now given of Chriſtianity, moſt ſtrongly ſhews and enforces upon us the obligation of ſearching the Scriptures, in order to ſee, what the ſcheme of Revelation really is; inſtead of determining beforehand, from Reaſon, what the ſcheme of it muſt be *. Indeed if in Revelation there be found any paſſages, the ſeeming meaning of which, is contrary to Natural Religion; we may moſt certainly conclude, ſuch ſeeming meaning not to be the real one. But it is not any degree of a preſumption againſt an interpretation of Scripture, that ſuch interpretation contains a doctrine, which the Light of Nature cannot diſcover †; or a precept, which the Law of Nature does not oblige to.

* See chap. iii.

† p. 195, 196.

PART II.

CHAP. II.

Of the ſuppoſed Preſumption againſt a Revelation, conſidered as miraculous.

HAVING ſhewn the Importance of the Chriſtian Revelation, and the Obligations which we are under ſeriouſly to attend to it, upon ſuppoſition of its Truth, or its Credibility: The next thing in order, is to conſider the ſuppoſed Preſumptions againſt Revelation in general; which ſhall be the ſubject of this chapter: and the objections againſt the Chriſtian in particular; which ſhall be the ſubject of ſome following ones *. For it ſeems the moſt natural method, to remove theſe prejudices againſt Chriſtianity; before we proceed to the conſideration of the poſitive evidence for it, and the objections againſt that evidence †.

IT is, I think, commonly ſuppoſed, that there is ſome peculiar Preſumption, from the Analogy of Nature, againſt the Chriſtian Scheme of things; at leaſt againſt miracles: ſo as that ſtronger evidence is neceſſary to prove the Truth and Reality of them, than would be ſufficient to convince us of other events, or matters of fact. Indeed the conſideration of this ſuppoſed Preſumption, cannot but be thought very inſignificant, by many perſons. Yet, as it belongs to the ſubject of this treatiſe; ſo it

* Chap. iii. iv, v, vi. † ch. vii.

may tend to open the mind, and remove ſome prejudices; however needleſs the conſideration of it be; upon its own account.

I. I find no appearance of a Preſumption, from the Analogy of Nature, againſt the general Scheme of Chriſtianity, that God created and inviſibly governs the world by Jeſus Chriſt; and by him alſo will hereafter judge it in righteouſneſs, *i. e.* render to every one according to his works: and that good men are under the ſecret influence of his Spirit. Whether theſe things are, or are not, to be called miraculous, is, perhaps, only a queſtion about words; or however, is of no moment in the caſe. If the Analogy of Nature raiſes any preſumption againſt this general Scheme of Chriſtianity, it muſt be, either becauſe it is not diſcoverable by Reaſon or Experience; or elſe, becauſe it is unlike that courſe of nature, which is. But Analogy raiſes no Preſumption againſt the Truth of this Scheme, upon either of theſe accounts.

* *Firſt*, THERE is no Preſumption, from Analogy, againſt the Truth of it, upon account of its not being diſcoverable by Reaſon or Experience. For ſuppoſe one who never heard of Revelation, of the moſt improved underſtanding, and acquainted with our whole Syſtem of Natural Philoſophy and Natural Religion: ſuch an one could not but be ſenſible, that it was but a very ſmall part of the natural and

* This paragraph is referr'd to above in Part I. ch. i. p. 37.

moral ſyſtem of the univerſe, which he was acquainted with. He could not but be ſenſible, that there muſt be innumerable things, in the diſpenſations of Providence paſt, in the inviſible government over the world at preſent carrying on, and in what is to come; of which he was wholly ignorant *, and which could not be diſcovered without Revelation. Whether the Scheme of Nature be, in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, infinite or not; it is evidently vaſt, even beyond all poſſible imagination. And doubtleſs, that part of it, which is opened to our view, is but as a point, in compariſon of the whole plan of Providence, reaching throughout eternity paſt and future; in compariſon of what is even now going on, in the remote parts of the boundleſs univerſe; nay in compariſon of the whole ſcheme of this world. And therefore, that things lie beyond the natural reach of our faculties, is no ſort of preſumption againſt the truth and reality of them: becauſe it is certain, there are innumerable things, in the conſtitution and government of the univerſe, which are thus beyond the natural reach of our faculties.

Secondly, ANALOGY raiſes no Preſumption, againſt any of the things contained in this general doctrine of Scripture now mentioned, upon account of their being unlike the known Courſe of Nature. For there is no preſumption at all from Analogy, that the *whole* Courſe of things, or Divine Government, naturally unknown to us, and *every thing* in it, is like to any thing in That which is known; and therefore no peculiar Preſumption againſt any thing in the former, upon account of

* Page 149.

its being unlike to any thing in the latter. And in the conſtitution and natural government of the world, as well as in the moral government of it, we ſee things, in a great degree, unlike one another: and therefore ought not to wonder at ſuch unlikeneſs between things viſible and inviſible. However, the Scheme of Chriſtianity is by no means intirely unlike the Scheme of Nature; as will appear in the following part of this Treatiſe.

THE notion of a Miracle, conſidered as a proof of a divine miſſion, has been ſtated with great exactneſs by Divines; and is, I think, ſufficiently underſtood by every one. There are alſo inviſible miracles, the Incarnation of Chriſt, for inſtance, which, being ſecret, cannot be alledged as a proof of ſuch a miſſion; but require themſelves to be proved by viſible miracles. Revelation itſelf too is miraculous; and miracles are the proof of it: and the ſuppoſed Preſumption againſt theſe ſhall preſently be conſidered. All which I have been obſerving here is, that, whether we chuſe to call every thing in the diſpenſations of Providence, not diſcoverable without revelation, nor like the known courſe of things, miraculous; and whether the general Chriſtian diſpenſation now mentioned, is to be called ſo, or not; the foregoing obſervations ſeem certainly to ſhew, that there is no Preſumption againſt it, from the Analogy of Nature.

II. THERE is no Preſumption, from Analogy, againſt ſome operations, which, we ſhould now call miraculous; particularly none againſt a Revelation,

at the beginning of the world: nothing of ſuch preſumption againſt it, as is ſuppoſed to be implied or expreſſed in the word, *miraculous*. For a miracle, in its very notion, is relative to a Courſe of Nature; and implies ſomewhat different from it, conſidered as being ſo. Now, either there was no Courſe of Nature at the time which we are ſpeaking of: or if there were, we are not acquainted, what the Courſe of Nature is, upon the firſt peopling of worlds. And therefore the queſtion, whether mankind had a Revelation made to them at that time, is to be conſidered, not as a queſtion concerning a miracle, but as a common queſtion of fact. And we have the like reaſon, be it more or leſs, to admit the report of tradition, concerning this queſtion, and concerning common matters of fact of the ſame antiquity; for inſtance, what part of the earth was firſt peopled.

OR thus: When mankind was firſt placed in this ſtate, there was a power exerted, totally different from the preſent Courſe of Nature. Now, whether this power, thus wholly different from the preſent Courſe of Nature, for we cannot properly apply to it the word *miraculous*; whether this power ſtopped immediately after it had made man, or went on, and exerted itſelf farther in giving him a Revelation, is a queſtion of the ſame kind, as whether an ordinary power exerted itſelf in ſuch a particular degree and manner, or not.

OR ſuppoſe the power exerted in the formation of the world, be conſidered as miraculous, or ra-

ther, be called by that name; the caſe will not be different: ſince it muſt be acknowledged, that ſuch a power was exerted. For ſuppoſing it acknowledged, that our Saviour ſpent ſome years in a courſe of working miracles: there is no more preſumption, worth mentioning, againſt his having exerted this miraculous power, in a certain degree greater, than in a certain degree leſs; in one or two more inſtances, than in one or two fewer; in this, than in another manner.

IT is evident then, that there can be no peculiar Preſumption, from the Analogy of Nature, againſt ſuppoſing a Revelation, when man was firſt placed upon the earth.

AND, that there does not appear the leaſt intimation in hiſtory or tradition, that religion was firſt reaſoned out: but the whole of hiſtory and tradition makes for the other ſide, that it came into the world by Revelation. Indeed the ſtate of religion in the firſt ages, of which we have any account, ſeems to ſuppoſe and imply, that this was the original of it amongſt mankind. And theſe reflections together, without taking in the peculiar authority of Scripture, amount to real and a very material degree of evidence, that there was a Revelation at the beginning of the world. Now this, as it is a confirmation of Natural Religion, and therefore mentioned in the former part of this treatiſe*; ſo likewiſe it has a tendency to remove any prejudices againſt a ſubſequent Revelation.

* Pag. 140, &c.

III. BUT ſtill it may be objected, that there is ſome peculiar Preſumption, from Analogy, againſt miracles; particularly againſt Revelation, after the ſettlement and during the continuance of a Courſe of Nature.

Now with regard to this ſuppoſed Preſumption, it is to be obſerved in general; that before we can have ground for raiſing what can, with any propriety, be called an *argument* from Analogy, for or againſt Revelation conſidered as ſomewhat miraculous, we muſt be acquainted with a ſimilar or parallel caſe. But the Hiſtory of ſome other world, ſeemingly in like circumſtances with our own, is no more than a parallel caſe: and therefore nothing ſhort of this, can be ſo. Yet, could we come at a preſumptive proof, for or againſt a Revelation, from being informed, whether ſuch world had one, or not; ſuch a proof, being drawn from one ſingle inſtance only, muſt be infinitely precarious. More particularly: *Firſt* of all; There is a very ſtrong preſumption againſt common ſpeculative truths, and againſt the moſt ordinary facts, before the proof of them; which yet is overcome by almoſt any proof. There is a preſumption of millions to one, againſt the ſtory of Caeſar, or of any other man. For ſuppoſe a number of common facts ſo and ſo circumſtanced, of which one had no kind of proof, ſhould happen to come into one's thoughts; every one would, without any poſſible doubt, conclude them to be falſe. And the like may be ſaid of a ſingle common fact. And from hence it appears, that the queſtion of importance, as to the mat-

ter before us, is, concerning the degree of the peculiar preſumption ſuppoſed againſt miracles; not whether there be any peculiar preſumption at all againſt them. For, if there be the preſumption of millions to one, againſt the moſt common facts; What can a ſmall preſumption, additional to this, amount to, though it be peculiar? It cannot be eſtimated, and is as nothing. The only material queſtion is, whether there be any ſuch preſumption againſt miracles, as to render them in any ſort incredible. *Secondly*, If we leave out the conſideration of religion, we are in ſuch total darkneſs, upon what cauſes, occaſions, reaſons, or circumſtances, the preſent Courſe of Nature depends; that there does not appear any improbability for or againſt ſuppoſing, that five or ſix thouſand years may have given ſcope for cauſes, occaſions, reaſons, or circumſtances, from whence miraculous interpoſitions may have ariſen. And from this, joined with the foregoing obſervation, it will follow, that there muſt be a preſumption, beyond all compariſon, greater, againſt the *particular* common facts juſt now inſtanced in, than againſt miracles *in general*; before any evidence of either. But, *Thirdly*, Take in the conſideration of religion, or the moral ſyſtem of the world, and then we ſee diſtinct particular reaſons for miracles: to afford mankind inſtruction additional to that of nature, and to atteſt the truth of it. And this gives a real credibility to the ſuppoſition, that it might be part of the original plan of things, that there ſhould be miraculous interpoſitions. Then, *Laſtly*, Miracles muſt not be

compared to common natural events; or to events which, though uncommon, are ſimilar to what we daily experience: but to the extraordinary phenomena of nature. And then the compariſon will be between the preſumption againſt miracles, and the preſumption againſt ſuch uncommon appearances, ſuppoſe, as comets, and againſt there being any ſuch powers in nature as magnetiſm and electricity, ſo contrary to the properties of other bodies not endued with theſe powers. And before any one can determine, whether there be any peculiar preſumption againſt miracles, more than againſt other extraordinary things; he muſt conſider, what, upon firſt hearing, would be the preſumption againſt the laſt mentioned appearance and powers, to a perſon acquainted only with the daily, monthly, and annual, courſe of Nature reſpecting this earth, and with thoſe common powers of matter which we every day ſee.

Upon all this I conclude; That there certainly is no ſuch Preſumption againſt miracles, as to render them in any wiſe incredible: That on the contrary, our being able to diſcern reaſons for them, gives a poſitive credibility to the hiſtory of them, in caſes where thoſe reaſons hold: And That it is by no means certain, that there is any peculiar preſumption at all, from analogy, even in the loweſt degree, againſt miracles, as diſtinguiſhed from other extraordinary phenomena: though it is not worth while to perplex the reader, with inquiries into the abſtract nature of evidence, in order to determine a queſtion, which, without ſuch inquiries, we ſee * is of no importance.

* Pag. 200, 201.

PART II.

CHAP. III.

Of our Incapacity of judging, what were to be expected in a Revelation; and the Credibility, from Analogy, that it muſt contain things appearing liable to objections.

BESIDES the objections againſt the Evidence for Chriſtianity, many are alledged againſt the Scheme of it; againſt the whole manner in which it is put and left with the world; as well as againſt ſeveral particular relations in Scripture: Objections drawn, from the deficiencies of Revelation; from things in it appearing to men *fooliſhneſs**; from its containing matters of offence, which have led, and it muſt have been foreſeen would lead, into ſtrange enthuſiaſm and ſuperſtition, and be made to ſerve the purpoſes of tyranny and wickedneſs; from its not being univerſal; and, which is a thing of the ſame kind, from its evidence not being ſo convincing and ſatisfactory as it might have been: for this laſt is ſometimes turned into a poſitive argument againſt its Truth.† It would be tedious, indeed impoſſible, to enumerate the ſeveral particulars comprehended under the objections here referred to; they being ſo various, according to the different fancies of men. There are perſons, who

* 1 Cor. i. 18. † See Ch. vi.

think it a ſtrong objection againſt the authority of Scripture, that it is not compoſed by rules of art, agreed upon by criticks, for polite and correct writing. And the ſcorn is inexpreſſible, with which ſome of the prophetic parts of Scripture are treated: partly through the raſhneſs of interpreters; but very much alſo, on account of the hieroglyphical and figurative language, in which they are left us. Some of the principal things of this ſort, ſhall be particularly conſidered, in following chapters. But my deſign at preſent, is to obſerve in general, with reſpect to this whole way of arguing, that, upon ſuppoſition of a Revelation, it is highly credible beforehand, we ſhould be incompetent judges of it, to a great degree: and that it would contain many things appearing to us liable to great objections; in caſe we judge of it otherwiſe, than by the Analogy of Nature. And therefore, though objections againſt the Evidence of Chriſtianity are moſt ſeriouſly to be conſidered; yet objections againſt Chriſtianity itſelf are, in a great meaſure, frivolous: almoſt all objections againſt it, excepting thoſe which are alledged againſt the particular proofs of its coming from God. I expreſs myſelf with caution, leſt I ſhould be miſtaken to vilify Reaſon: which is indeed the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning any thing, even Revelation itſelf: or be miſunderſtood to aſſert, that a ſuppoſed Revelation cannot be proved falſe, from internal characters. For, it may contain clear immoralities or contradictions: and either of theſe would prove it falſe. Nor will I take upon me to affirm, that nothing elſe can poſſibly render any ſuppoſed Revelation

incredible. Yet ſtill the obſervation above is, I think, true beyond doubt; that objections againſt Chriſtianity, as diſtinguiſhed from objections againſt its evidence, are frivolous. To make out this, is the general deſign of the preſent chapter. And with regard to the whole of it, I cannot but particularly wiſh, that the proofs might be attended to; rather than the aſſertions cavilled at, upon account of any unacceptable conſequences, whether real or ſuppoſed, which may be drawn from them. For, after all, that which is true, muſt be admitted, though it ſhould ſhew us the ſhortneſs of our faculties; and that we are in no wiſe judges of many things, of which we are apt to think ourſelves very competent ones. Nor will this be any objection with reaſonable men, at leaſt upon ſecond thought it will not be any objection with ſuch, againſt the juſtneſs of the following obſervations.

As God governs the world, and inſtructs his creatures, according to certain laws or rules, in the known Courſe of Nature; known by Reaſon together with Experience: ſo the Scripture informs us of a Scheme of divine providence, additional to this. It relates, that God has, by Revelation, inſtructed men in things concerning his Government, which they could not otherwiſe have known; and reminded them of things, which they might otherwiſe know: and atteſted the truth of the whole, by miracles. Now if the natural and the revealed diſpenſation of things are both from God, if they coincide with each other, and together make up one ſcheme

of providence: our being incompetent judges of one, muſt render it credible, that we may be incompetent judges alſo of the other. Since, upon experience, the acknowledged conſtitution and courſe of nature is found to be greatly different from what, before experience, would have been expected; and ſuch as, men fancy, there lie great objections againſt: this renders it beforehand highly credible, that they may find the revealed diſpenſation likewiſe, if they judge of it as they do of the conſtitution of nature, very different from expectations formed beforehand; and liable, in appearance, to great objections: Objections againſt the ſcheme itſelf, and againſt the degrees and manners of the miraculous interpoſitions, by which it was atteſted and carried on. Thus ſuppoſe a prince to govern his dominions in the wiſeſt manner poſſible, by common known laws; and that upon ſome exigencies he ſhould ſuſpend theſe laws; and govern, in ſeveral inſtances, in a different manner: If one of his ſubjects were not a competent judge beforehand, by what common rules the government ſhould or would be carried on; it could not be expected, that the ſame perſon would be a competent judge, in what exigencies, or in what manner, or to what degree, thoſe laws commonly obſerved would be ſuſpended or deviated from. If he were not a judge of the wiſdom of the ordinary adminiſtration; there is no reaſon to think, he would be a judge of the wiſdom of the extraordinary. If he thought he had objections againſt the former; doubtleſs, it is highly ſuppoſeable, he might think alſo, that he had objections againſt the latter. And thus, as we fall into infinite

follies and miſtakes, whenever we pretend, otherwiſe than from Experience and Analogy, to judge of the Conſtitution and Courſe of Nature; it is evidently ſuppoſeable beforehand, that we ſhould fall into as great, in pretending to judge, in like manner, concerning Revelation. Nor is there any more ground to expect, that this latter ſhould appear to us clear of objections, than that the former ſhould.

THESE obſervations, relating to the Whole of Chriſtianity, are applicable to inſpiration in particular. As we are in no ſort judges beforehand, by what laws or rules, in what degree, or by what means, it were to have been expected, that God would naturally inſtruct us: ſo upon ſuppoſition of his affording us light and inſtruction by Revelation, additional to what he has afforded us by Reaſon and Experience, we are in no ſort judges, by what methods, and in what proportion, it were to be expected, that this ſupernatural light and inſtruction would be afforded us. We know not beforehand, what degree or kind of natural information, it were to be expected God would afford men, each by his own reaſon and experience: nor how far he would enable, and effectually diſpoſe them to communicate it, whatever it ſhould be, to each other: nor whether the evidence of it would be, certain, highly probable, or doubtful: nor whether it would be given with equal clearneſs and conviction to all. Nor could we gueſs, upon any good ground I mean, whether natural knowledge, or even the faculty itſelf, by which we are capable of attaining it, reaſon,

would be given us at once, or gradually. In like manner, we are wholly ignorant what degree of new knowledge, it were to be expected, God would give mankind by Revelation, upon ſuppoſition of his affording one: or how far, or in what way, he would interpoſe miraculouſly, to qualify them, to whom he ſhould originally make the Revelation, for communicating the knowledge given by it; and to ſecure their doing it to the age in which they ſhould live; and to ſecure its being tranſmitted to poſterity. We are equally ignorant, whether the evidence of it would be, certain, or highly probable, or doubtful*: or whether all who ſhould have any degree of inſtruction from it, and any degree of evidence of its truth, would have the ſame: or whether the ſcheme would be revealed at once, or unfolded gradually. Nay we are not in any ſort able to judge, whether it were to have been expected, that the Revelation ſhould have been committed to writing; or left to be handed down, and conſequently corrupted by verbal tradition, and at length ſunk under it, if mankind ſo pleaſed, and during ſuch time as they are permitted, in the degree they evidently are, to act as they will.

But it may be ſaid, "that a Revelation in ſome "of the above-mentioned circumſtances; one, for "inſtance, which was not committed to writing, "and thus ſecured againſt danger of corruption, "would not have anſwered its purpoſe." I aſk, what purpoſe? It would not have anſwered all the purpoſes which it has now anſwered, and in the ſame

* See Chap. vi.

degree: but it would have anſwered others, or the ſame in different degrees. And which of theſe were the purpoſes of God, and beſt fell in with his general government, we could not at all have determined beforehand.

Now ſince it has been ſhewn, that we have no principles of reaſon, upon which to judge beforehand, how it were to be expected Revelation ſhould have been left, or what was moſt ſuitable to the divine plan of government, in any of the forementioned reſpects; it muſt be quite frivolous to object afterwards as to any of them, againſt its being left in one way, rather than another: For this would be to object againſt things, upon account of their being different from expectations, which have been ſhewn to be without reaſon. And thus we ſee, that the only queſtion concerning the Truth of Chriſtianity, is, whether it be a real Revelation: not whether it be attended with every cirumſtance which we ſhould have looked for: and concerning the authority of Scripture, whether it be what it claims to be; not whether it be a book of ſuch ſort, and ſo promulged, as weak men are apt to fancy, a book containing a divine Revelation ſhould. And therefore, neither obſcurity, nor ſeeming inaccuracy of ſtile, not various readings, nor early diſputes about the authors of particular parts; nor any other things of the like kind, though they had been much more conſiderable in degree than they are, could overthrow the Authority of the Scripture: unleſs the Prophets, Apoſtles, or our Lord, had promiſed, that the book containing the divine Revelation, ſhould be ſecure from thoſe things. Nor indeed

can any objections overthrow ſuch a kind of Revelation as the Chriſtian claims to be; ſince there are no objections againſt the morality of it*, but ſuch as can ſhew, that there is no proof of miracles wrought originally in atteſtation of it; no appearance of any thing miraculous in its obtaining in the world; nor any of prophecy, that is, of events foretold, which human ſagacity could not foreſee. If it can be ſhewn, that the proof alledged for all theſe, is abſolutely none at all, then is Revelation overturned. But were it allowed, that the proof of any one or all of them, is lower than is allowed; yet, whilſt any proof of them remains, Revelation will ſtand upon much the ſame foot it does at preſent, as to all the purpoſes of life and practice, and ought to have the like influences upon our behaviour.

From the foregoing obſervations too, it will follow, and thoſe who will thoroughly examine into Revelation, will find it worth remarking; that there are ſeveral ways of arguing, which, though juſt with regard to other writings, are not applicable to Scripture: at leaſt not to the prophetic parts of it. We cannot argue, for inſtance, that this cannot be the ſenſe or intent of ſuch a paſſage of Scripture; for if it had, it would have been expreſſed more plainly, or have been repreſented under a more apt figure or hieroglyphic. Yet we may juſtly argue thus, with reſpect to common books. And the reaſon of this difference is very evident; that in Scripture, we are not competent judges, as we are in com-

* Pag. 219, 220.

mon books, how plainly it were to have been expected, what is the true ſenſe ſhould have been expreſt, or under how apt an image figured. The only queſtion is, what appearance there is, that this is the ſenſe; and ſcarce at all, how much more determinately, and accurately it might have been expreſt or figured.

"BUT is it not ſelf-evident, that internal improbabilities of all kinds, weaken external probable proof?" Doubtleſs. But to what practical purpoſe can this be alledged here, when it has been proved before *, that real internal improbabilities which riſe even to a moral certainty, are overcome by the moſt ordinary teſtimony; and when it now has been made appear, that we ſcarce know what are improbabilities, as to the matter we are here conſidering: as it will farther appear from what follows.

FOR though from the obſervations above made, it is manifeſt, that we are not in any ſort competent judges, what ſupernatural inſtruction were to have been expected; and though it is ſelf-evident, that the objections of an incompetent judgment muſt be frivolous: Yet it may be proper to go one ſtep farther, and obſerve; that if men will be regardleſs of theſe things, and pretend to judge of the Scripture by preconceived expectations; the Analogy of Nature ſhews beforehand, not only that it is highly credible they may, but alſo probable that they will, imagine they have ſtrong objections againſt it,

* p. 200, 201.

however really unexceptionable: for ſo, prior to experience, they would think they had, againſt the circumſtances and degrees and the whole manner of that inſtruction, which is afforded by the ordinary courſe of nature. Were the inſtruction which God affords to brute creatures by inſtincts and mere propenſions, and to mankind by theſe together with reaſon, matter of probable proof, and not of certain obſervation; it would be rejected as incredible, in many inſtances of it, only upon account of the means by which this inſtruction is given, the ſeeming diſproportions, the limitations, neceſſary conditions, and circumſtances of it. For inſtance: Would it not have been thought highly improbable, that men ſhould have been ſo much more capable of diſcovering, even to certainty, the general laws of Matter, and the magnitudes, paths and revolutions of the heavenly bodies; than the occaſions and cures of diſtempers, and many other things, in which human life ſeems ſo much more nearly concerned, than in aſtronomy? How capricious and irregular a way of information, would it be ſaid, is that of *invention*, by means of which, nature inſtructs us in matters of ſcience, and in many things, upon which the affairs of the world greatly depend: That a man ſhould, by this faculty, be made acquainted with a thing in an inſtant, when perhaps he is thinking of ſomewhat elſe, which he has in vain been ſearching after, it may be, for years. So likewiſe the imperfections attending the only method, by which nature enables and directs us to communicate our thoughts to each other, are innumerable. Language is, in its very nature, inadequate, ambi-

guous, liable to infinite abuſe, even from negligence; and ſo liable to it from deſign, that every man can deceive and betray by it. And, to mention but one inſtance more; that brutes, without reaſon, ſhould act, in many reſpects, with a ſagacity and foreſight vaſtly greater than what men have in thoſe reſpects, would be thought impoſſible. Yet it is certain they do act with ſuch ſuperior foreſight: whether it be their own indeed, is another queſtion. From theſe things it is highly credible beforehand, that upon ſuppoſition God ſhould afford men ſome additional inſtruction by Revelation, it would be with circumſtances, in manners, degrees and reſpects, which we ſhould be apt to fancy we had great objections againſt the credibility of. Nor are the objections againſt the Scripture, nor againſt Chriſtianity in general, at all more or greater, than the analogy of nature would beforehand——not perhaps give ground to expect; for this analogy may not be ſufficient, in ſome caſes, to ground an expectation upon; but no more nor greater, that analogy would ſhew it, beforehand, to be ſuppoſeable and credible, that there might ſeem to lie againſt Revelation.

By applying theſe general obſervations to a particular objection, it will be more diſtinctly ſeen, how they are applicable to others of the like kind; and indeed to almoſt all objections againſt Chriſtianity, as diſtinguiſhed from objections againſt its evidence. It appears from Scripture, that, as it was not unuſual in the apoſtolic age, for perſons, upon their converſion to Chriſtianity, to be endued with miraculous gifts; ſo, ſome of thoſe perſons exerciſed theſe

gifts in a ſtrangely irregular and diſorderly manner: And this is made an objection againſt their being really miraculous. Now the foregoing obſervations quite remove this objection, how conſiderable ſoever it may appear at firſt ſight. For, conſider a perſon endued with any of theſe gifts; for inſtance, That of tongues: It is to be ſuppoſed, that he had the ſame power over this miraculous gift, as he would have had over it, had it been the effect of habit, of ſtudy and uſe, as it ordinarily is; or the ſame power over it, as he had over any other natural endowment. Conſequently, he would uſe it in the ſame manner he did any other; either regularly, and upon proper occaſions only, or irregularly and upon improper ones: according to his ſenſe of decency, and his character of prudence. Where then is the objection? Why, if this miraculous power was indeed given to the world, to propagate Chriſtianity, and atteſt the truth of it, we might, it ſeems, have expected, that other ſort of perſons ſhould have been choſen to be inveſted with it; or that theſe ſhould, at the ſame time have been endued with prudence; or that they ſhould have been, continually, reſtrained and directed in the exerciſe of it: *i. e.* that God ſhould have miraculouſly interpoſed, if at all, in a different manner or higher degree. But from the obſervations made above, it is undeniably evident, that we are not judges, in what degrees and manners, it were to have been expected, he ſhould miraculouſly interpoſe; upon ſuppoſition of his doing it in ſome degree and manner. Nor, in the natural courſe of providence, are ſuperior gifts of memory, eloquence, knowledge,

and other talents of great influence, conferred only on perſons of prudence and decency, or ſuch as are diſpoſed to make the propereſt uſe of them. Nor is the inſtruction and admonition naturally afforded us for the conduct of life, particularly in our education, commonly given in a manner the moſt ſuited to recommend it; but often with circumſtances apt to prejudice us againſt ſuch inſtruction.

ONE might go on to add, that there is a great reſemblance between the Light of Nature and of Revelation, in ſeveral other reſpects. Practical Chriſtianity, or that faith and behaviour which renders a man a chriſtian, is a plain and obvious thing: like the common rules of conduct, with reſpect to our ordinary temporal affairs. The more diſtinct and particular knowledge of thoſe things, the ſtudy of which the apoſtle calls *going on unto perfection**, and of the prophetic parts of Revelation, like many parts of natural and even civil knowledge, may require very exact thought, and careful conſideration. The hindrances too, of natural, and of ſupernatural light and knowledge, have been of the ſame kind. And as, it is owned, the whole ſcheme of Scripture is not yet underſtood: ſo, if it ever comes to be underſtood, before the *reſtitution of all things*†, and without miraculous interpoſitions; it muſt be in the ſame way as natural knowledge is come at: by the continuance and progreſs of learning and of liberty; and by particular perſons attending to, comparing and purſuing intimations ſcattered up and down it, which

* Heb. vi. 1. † Acts iii 21.

are overlooked and diſregarded by the generality of the world. For this is the way, in which all improvements are made; by thoughtful mens tracing on obſcure hints, as it were, dropped us by nature accidentally, or which ſeem to come into our minds by chance. Nor is it at all incredible, that a book, which has been ſo long in the poſſeſſion of mankind, ſhould contain many truths as yet undiſcovered. For, all the ſame phenomena, and the ſame faculties of inveſtigation, from which ſuch great diſcoveries in natural knowledge have been made in the preſent and laſt age, were equally in the poſſeſſion of mankind, ſeveral thouſand years before. And poſſibly it might be intended, that events, as they come to paſs, ſhould open and aſcertain the meaning of ſeveral parts of Scripture.

It may be objected, that this Analogy fails in a material reſpect: for that natural knowledge is of little or no conſequence. But I have been ſpeaking of the general inſtruction, which nature does or does not afford us. And beſides, ſome parts of natural knowledge, in the more common reſtrained ſenſe of the words, are of the greateſt conſequence to the eaſe and convenience of life. But ſuppoſe the analogy did, as it does not, fail in this reſpect, yet it might be abundantly ſupplied, from the whole conſtitution and courſe of nature: which ſhews, that God does not diſpenſe his gifts, according to our notions of the advantage and conſequence they would be of to us. And this in general, with his method of diſpenſing knowledge in particular, would together make out an analogy full to the point before us.

BUT it may be objected ſtill farther and more generally; "The Scripture repreſents the world "as in a ſtate of ruin, and Chriſtianity as an ex- "pedient to recover it, to help in theſe reſpects "where Nature fails: in particular, to ſupply "the deficiencies of natural light. Is it cre- "dible then, that ſo many ages ſhould have been "let paſs, before a matter of ſuch a ſort, of "ſo great and ſo general importance, was made "known to mankind; and then that it ſhould "be made known to ſo ſmall a part of them? "Is it conceiveable, that this ſupply ſhould be "ſo very deficient, ſhould have the like obſcu- "rity and doubtfulneſs, be liable to the like per- "verſions, in ſhort, lie open to all the like objec- "tions, as the Light of Nature itſelf?*" Without determining how far this in fact is ſo, I anſwer; It is by no means incredible, that it might be ſo, if the light of Nature and of Revelation be from the ſame hand. Men are naturally liable to diſeaſes: for which God, in his good providence, has provided natural remedies†. But remedies exiſting in nature, have been unknown to mankind for many ages: are known but to few now: probably many valuable ones are not known yet. Great has been and is the obſcurity and difficulty, in the nature and application of them. Circumſtances ſeem often to make them very improper, where they are abſolutely neceſſary. It is after long labour and ſtudy, and many unſucceſsful endeavours, that they are brought to be as uſeful, as they are; after

* Ch. vi. † See Ch. v.

high contempt and abſolute rejection of the moſt uſeful we have; and after diſputes and doubts, which have ſeemed to be endleſs. The beſt remedies too, when unſkillfully, much more if diſhoneſtly applied, may produce new diſeaſes: and with the righteſt application, the ſucceſs of them is often doubtful. In many caſes, they are not at all effectual: where they are, it is often very ſlowly: and the application of them, and the neceſſary regimen accompanying it, is, not uncommonly, ſo diſagreeable, that ſome will not ſubmit to them; and ſatisfy themſelves with the excuſe, that if they would, it is not certain, whether it would be ſucceſsful. And many perſons, who labour under diſeaſes, for which there are known natural remedies, are not ſo happy as to be always, if ever, in the way of them. In a word, the remedies which Nature has provided for diſeaſes, are neither certain, perfect, nor univerſal. And indeed the ſame principles of arguing, which would lead us to conclude, that they muſt be ſo, would lead us likewiſe to conclude, that there could be no occaſion for them; *i. e.* that there could be no diſeaſes at all. And therefore, our experience that there are diſeaſes, ſhews, that it is credible beforehand, upon ſuppoſition nature has provided remedies for them, that theſe remedies may be, as by experience we find they are, not certain, nor perfect, nor univerſal; becauſe it ſhews, that the principles upon which we ſhould expect the contrary, are fallacious.

And now, what is the juſt conſequence from all theſe things? Not that Reaſon is no judge of what

is offered to us as being of Divine Revelation. For this would be to infer, that we are unable to judge of any thing, becauſe we are unable to judge of all things. Reaſon can, and it ought to judge, not only of the meaning, but alſo of the Morality and the Evidence, of Revelation. *Firſt*, It is the province of Reaſon to judge of the Morality of the Scripture; *i. e.* not whether it contains things different from what we ſhould have expected, from a wiſe, juſt and good Being; for objections from hence have been now obviated: but whether it contains things plainly contradictory to Wiſdom, Juſtice or Goodneſs; to what the Light of Nature teaches us of God. And I know nothing of this ſort objected againſt Scripture, excepting ſuch objections as are formed upon ſuppoſitions, which would equally conclude, that the Conſtitution of Nature is contradictory to Wiſdom, Juſtice or Goodneſs; which moſt certainly it is not. Indeed there are ſome particular precepts in Scripture, given to particular perſons, requiring actions, which would be immoral and vicious, were it not for ſuch precepts. But it is eaſy to ſee, that all theſe are of ſuch a kind, as that the precept changes the whole nature of the caſe, and of the action; and both conſtitutes, and ſhews That not to be unjuſt or immoral which, prior to the precept, muſt have appeared and really have been ſo; which may well be, ſince none of theſe precepts are contrary to immutable morality. If it were commanded, to cultivate the principles, and act from the ſpirit of treachery, ingratitude, cruelty; the command would

not alter the nature of the caſe or of the action, in any of theſe inſtances. But it is quite otherwiſe in precepts, which require only the doing an external action: for inſtance, taking away the property or life of any. For men have no right to either life or property, but what ariſes ſolely from the grant of God: When this grant is revoked, they ceaſe to have any right at all, in either: And when this revocation is made known, as ſurely it is poſſible it may be, it muſt ceaſe to be unjuſt to deprive them of either. And though a courſe of external acts, which without command would be immoral, muſt make an immoral habit; yet a few detached commands have no ſuch natural tendency. I thought proper to ſay thus much of the few Scripture precepts, which require, not vicious actions, but actions which would have been vicious had it not been for ſuch precepts; becauſe they are ſometimes weakly urged as immoral, and great weight is laid upon objections drawn from them. But to me there ſeems no difficulty at all in theſe precepts, but what ariſes from their being offences: *i. e.* from their being liable to be perverted, as indeed they are, by wicked deſigning men, to ſerve the moſt horrid purpoſes; and perhaps, to miſlead the weak and enthuſiaſtic. And objections from this head, are not objections againſt Revelation; but againſt the whole notion of religion, as a trial; and againſt the general Conſtitution of Nature. *Secondly*, Reaſon is able to judge, and muſt, of the Evidence of Revelation, and of the objections urged againſt that evidence: which *ſhall* be the ſubject of a following chapter *.

* Ch. vii.

BUT the conſequence of the foregoing obſervations is, that the queſtion, upon which the Truth of Chriſtianity depends, is ſcarce at all, what objections there are againſt its Scheme, ſince there are none againſt the Morality of it; but *what objections there are againſt its Evidence*: or, *what proof there remains of it after due allowances made for the objections againſt that proof*: Becauſe it has been ſhewn that the *objections againſt Chriſtianity, as diſtinguiſhed from objections againſt its Evidence, are frivolous.* For ſurely very little weight, if any at all, is to be laid upon a way of arguing and objecting, which, when applied to the general Conſtitution of Nature, Experience ſhows not to be concluſive: and ſuch, I think, is the whole way of objecting treated of throughout this chapter. It is reſolvable into principles, and goes upon ſuppoſitions, which miſlead us to think, that the Author of Nature would not act, as we experience he does; or would act, in ſuch and ſuch caſes, as we experience he does not in like caſes. But the unreaſonableneſs of this way of objecting, will appear yet more evidently from hence, that the chief things thus objected againſt, are juſtified, as ſhall be farther ſhown *, by diſtinct, particular, and full analogies, in the conſtitution and courſe of nature.

BUT it is to be remembred, that, as frivolous as objections of the foregoing ſort againſt Revelation are, yet, when a ſuppoſed Revelation is more conſiſtent with itſelf, and has a more general and uni-

* Ch. iv. latter part. & v, vi.

form tendency to promote virtue, than, all circumſtances conſidered, could have been expected from Enthuſiaſm and political Views; this is a preſumptive proof of its not proceeding from Them, and ſo of its Truth: becauſe we are competent judges, what might have been expected from Enthuſiaſm and political Views.

PART II.

CHAP. IV.

Of Chriſtianity, conſidered as a Scheme or Conſtitution, imperfectly comprehended.

IT hath been now ſhewn *, that the Analogy of Nature renders it highly credible beforehand, that ſuppoſing a Revelation to be made, it muſt contain many things very different from what we ſhould have expected, and ſuch as appear open to great objections: And that this obſervation, in good meaſure, takes off the force of thoſe objections, or rather precludes them. But it may be alledged, that this is a very partial anſwer to ſuch objections, or a very unſatisfactory way of obviating them: becauſe it doth not ſhew at all, that the things objected againſt can be wiſe, juſt, and good; much leſs, that it is credible they are ſo. It will therefore be proper to ſhew this diſtinctly; by applying to theſe objections againſt the Wiſdom, Juſtice, and Goodneſs of Chriſtianity, the anſwer above † given to the like objections againſt the Conſtitution of Nature: before we conſider the particular Analogies in the latter, to the particular things objected againſt in the former. Now that which affords a ſufficient anſwer to the objections againſt the Wiſdom, Juſtice and Goodneſs of the Conſtitution of Nature, is its being a conſtitution, a ſyſtem or ſcheme, imperfect-

* In the foregoing chapter.

† Part I. ch. vii: to which this all along refers.

ly comprehended; a ſcheme, in which means are made uſe of to accompliſh ends; and which is carried on by general laws. For from theſe things it has been proved, not only to be poſſible, but alſo to be credible, that thoſe things which are objected againſt, may be conſiſtent with Wiſdom, Juſtice and Goodneſs; nay, may be inſtances of them: and even that the conſtitution and government of Nature may be perfect in the higheſt poſſible degree. If Chriſtianity then be a Scheme, and of the like kind; it is evident, the like objections againſt it, muſt admit of the like anſwer. And,

I. CHRISTIANITY is a Scheme, quite beyond our comprehenſion. The moral government of God is exerciſed, by gradually conducting things ſo in the courſe of his Providence, that every one, at length and upon the whole, ſhall receive according to his deſerts; and neither Fraud nor Violence, but Truth and Right, ſhall finally prevail. Chriſtianity is a particular Scheme under this general Plan of Providence, and a part of it, conducive to its completion, with regard to mankind: conſiſting itſelf alſo of various parts, and a myſterious Oeconomy, which has been carrying on from the time the world came into its preſent wretched ſtate, and is ſtill carrying on, for its recovery, by a Divine perſon, the Meſſiah; who is to *gather together in one, the children of God, that are ſcattered abroad* *, and eſtabliſh *an everlaſting kingdom, wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs* †. And in order to it; after va-

* John xi. 52. † 2 Pet. iii. 13.

rious manifeſtations of things, relating to this great and general Scheme of Providence, through a ſucceſſion of many ages: (For *the Spirit of Chriſt which was in the Prophets, teſtified beforehand his ſufferings, and the glory that ſhould follow: unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themſelves, but unto us they did miniſter the things which are now reported unto us by them that have preached the goſpel; which things the angels deſire to look into:* *) ——after various diſpenſations, looking forward, and preparatory, to this final ſalvation: *in the fulneſs of time*, when infinite Wiſdom thought fit; He, *being in the form of God,——made himſelf of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a ſervant, and was made in the likeneſs of men: And being found in faſhion as a man, he humbled himſelf, and became obedient to death, even the death of the croſs: Wherefore God alſo hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jeſus every knee ſhould bow, of things in heaven, and things in the earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue ſhould confeſs, that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* †. Parts likewiſe of this Oeconomy, are the miraculous miſſion of the Holy Ghoſt, and His ordinary aſſiſtances given to good men: the inviſible government, which Chriſt at preſent exerciſes over his church: That which he himſelf refers to in theſe words, ‡ *In my Father's houſe are many manſions——I go to prepare a place for you*: and his future return to *judge the world in righteouſneſs*, and compleatly re-eſtabliſh the Kingdom of God.

* 1 Pet. i. 11, 12. † Phil. ii. ‡ John xiv. 2.

For the Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men ſhould honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth†. And he muſt reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. Then cometh the end, when he ſhall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he ſhall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. And when all things ſhall be ſubdued unto him, then ſhall the Son alſo himſelf be ſubject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all‡.* Now little, ſurely, need be ſaid to ſhew, that this Syſtem, or Scheme of things, is but imperfectly comprehended by us. The Scripture expreſsly aſſerts it to be ſo. And indeed one cannot read a paſſage relating to this *great Myſtery of Godlineſs*§, but what immediately runs up into ſomething which ſhews us our Ignorance in it; as every thing in Nature ſhews us our Ignorance in the Conſtitution of Nature. And whoever will ſeriouſly conſider That part of the Chriſtian Scheme, which is revealed in Scripture, will find ſo much more unrevealed, as will convince him, that, to all the purpoſes of judging and objecting, we know as little of it, as of the Conſtitution of Nature. Our Ignorance, therefore, is as much an anſwer to our Objections againſt the Perfection of one, as againſt the Perfection of the other**.

II. IT is obvious too, that in the Chriſtian Diſpenſation, as much as in the natural Scheme of

* John v. 22, 23. † Matth. xxviii. 18. ‡ 1 Cor. xv.
§ 1 Tim. iii. 16. ** Pag. 149. &c.

things, Means are made uſe of to accompliſh Ends. And the obſervation of this furniſhes us with the ſame anſwer, to Objections againſt the Perfection of Chriſtianity, as to objections of the like kind, againſt the Conſtitution of Nature. It ſhews the Credibility, that the things objected, how *fooliſh** ſoever they appear to men, may be the very beſt means of acccompliſhing the very beſt Ends. And their appearing *Fooliſhneſs* is no preſumption againſt this, in a Scheme ſo greatly beyond our Comprehenſion†.

‡ III. THE credibility, that the Chriſtian Diſpenſation may have been, all along, carried on by general laws§, no leſs than the Courſe of Nature, may require to be more diſtinctly made out. Conſider then, upon what ground it is we ſay, that the whole common Courſe of Nature is carried on according to general fore-ordained laws. We know indeed ſeveral of the general laws of matter: and a great part of the natural behaviour of living agents, is reducible to general laws. But we know in a manner nothing, by what laws, ſtorms and tempeſts, earthquakes, famine, peſtilence, become the inſtruments of deſtruction to mankind. And the laws, by which perſons born into the world at ſuch a time and place, are of ſuch capacities, genius's, tempers; the laws, by which thoughts come into our mind, in a multitude of caſes; and by which innumerable things happen, of the greateſt influence upon the affairs and ſtate of the world; theſe laws are ſo wholly

* 1 Cor. i.

† This paragraph is referred to above in Part 1. ch. i. p. 37.

‡ Pag. 156, 157.

unknown to us, that we call the events which come to paſs by them, accidental: though all reaſonable men know certainly, that there cannot, in reality, be any ſuch thing as Chance; and conclude, that the things which have this appearance are the reſult of general laws, and may be reduced into them. It is then but an exceeding little way, and in but a very few reſpects, that we can trace up the natural courſe of things before us, to general laws. And it is only from Analogy, that we conclude the Whole of it to be capable of being reduced into them: only from our ſeeing, that Part is ſo. It is from our finding, that the Courſe of Nature, in ſome reſpects and ſo far, goes on by general laws, that we conclude this of the reſt. And if that be a juſt ground for ſuch a concluſion, it is a juſt ground alſo, if not to conclude, yet to apprehend to render it ſuppoſeable and credible, which is ſufficient for anſwering objections, that God's miraculous interpoſitions may have been, all along in like manner, by *general* laws of wiſdom. Thus, that miraculous powers ſhould be exerted, at ſuch times, upon ſuch occaſions, in ſuch degrees and manners, and with regard to ſuch perſons, rather than others; that the affairs of the world, being permitted to go on in their natural courſe ſo far, ſhould, juſt at ſuch a point, have a new direction given them by miraculous interpoſitions; that theſe interpoſitions ſhould be exactly in ſuch degrees and reſpects only; all this may have been by general laws. Theſe laws are unknown indeed to us: but no more unknown, than the laws from whence it is, that ſome die as ſoon as they are born, and others live to extream

old-age; that one man is ſo ſuperior to another in underſtanding; with innumerable more things, which, as was before obſerved, we cannot reduce to any laws or rules at all, though it is taken for granted, they are as much reducible to general ones, as gravitation. Now, if the Revealed Diſpenſations of Providence, and miraculous interpoſitions, be by general laws, as well as God's ordinary government in the Courſe of Nature, made known by Reaſon and Experience, there is no more reaſon to expect, that every exigence, as it ariſes, ſhould be provided for by theſe general laws of miraculous interpoſitions, than that every exigence in nature ſhould, by the general laws of Nature. Yet there might be wiſe and good reaſons, that miraculous interpoſitions ſhould be by general laws: and that theſe laws ſhould not be broken in upon, or deviated from, by other miracles.

UPON the whole then: The appearance of deficiencies and irregularities in Nature, is owing to its being a Scheme but in part made known, and of ſuch a certain particular kind in other reſpects. Now we ſee no more reaſon, why the Frame and Courſe of Nature ſhould be ſuch a Scheme, than why Chriſtianity ſhould. And that the former is ſuch a Scheme, renders it credible, that the latter, upon ſuppoſition of its Truth, may be ſo too. And as it is manifeſt, that Chriſtianity is a Scheme revealed but in part, and a Scheme in which means are made uſe of to accompliſh ends; like to That of Nature: So the credibility, that it may have been all along carried on by general laws, no leſs than the Courſe of

Nature, has been diſtinctly proved. And from all this it is beforehand credible that there might, I think probable that there would, be the like appearance of deficiencies and irregularities in Chriſtianity, as in Nature: *i. e.* that Chriſtianity would be liable to the like objections, as the Frame of Nature. And theſe objections are anſwered by theſe obſervations concerning Chriſtianity; as the like objections againſt the Frame of Nature, are anſwered by the like obſervations concerning the Frame of Nature.

THE objections againſt Chriſtianity, conſidered as a Matter of Fact*, having, in general, been obviated in the preceding chapter; and the ſame, conſidered as made againſt the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of it, having been obviated in this: the next thing, according to the method propoſed, is to ſhew, that the principal objections, in particular, againſt Chriſtianity, may be anſwered, by particular and full analogies in Nature. And as one of them is made againſt the whole Scheme of it together, as juſt now deſcribed, I chuſe to conſider it here, rather than in a diſtinct chapter by itſelf. The thing objected againſt this Scheme of the Goſpel, is, "that it ſeems to ſuppoſe, God was reduced to the "neceſſity of a long ſeries of intricate means, in "order to accompliſh his ends, the recovery and "ſalvation of the world: In like ſort as men, for "want of underſtanding or power, not being able "to come at their ends directly, are forced to go

* Page 148.

" round-about ways, and make uſe of many per-
" plext contrivances to arrive at them." Now every thing which we ſee, ſhews the folly of This, conſidered as an objection againſt the Truth of Chriſtianity. For, according to our manner of conception, God makes uſe of variety of means, what we often think tedious ones, in the natural courſe of providence, for the accompliſhment of all his ends. Indeed it is certain, there is ſomewhat in this matter quite beyond our comprehenſion: But the myſtery is as great in Nature, as in Chriſtianity. We know what we ourſelves aim at, as final ends: and what courſes we take, merely as means conducing to thoſe ends. But we are greatly ignorant, how far things are conſidered by the Author of Nature, under the ſingle Notion of Means and Ends; ſo as that it may be ſaid, This is merely an End, and That merely Means, in His regard. And whether there be not ſome peculiar abſurdity in our very manner of conception, concerning this matter, ſomewhat contradictory ariſing from our extremely imperfect views of things, it is impoſſible to ſay. However, thus much is manifeſt that the whole natural world and government of it is a Scheme or ſyſtem; not a fixt, but a progreſſive one: a Scheme, in which the operation of various means takes up a great length of time, before the ends they tend to can be attained. The change of ſeaſons, the ripening of the fruits of the earth, the very hiſtory of a flower, is an inſtance of this: and ſo is human life. Thus vegetable bo-

dies, and thoſe of animals, though poſſibly formed at once, yet grow up by degrees to a mature ſtate. And thus rational agents, who animate theſe latter bodies, are naturally directed to form, each his own manners and character, by the gradual gaining of knowledge and experience, and by a long courſe of action. Our exiſtence is not only ſucceſſive, as it muſt be of neceſſity; but one ſtate of our life and being, is appointed by God, to be a preparation for another; and that, to be the means of attaining to another ſucceeding one: Infancy to childhood, childhood to youth; youth to mature age. Men are impatient, and for precipitating things: but the Author of Nature appears deliberate throughout his operations; accompliſhing his natural ends, by ſlow ſucceſſive ſteps. And there is a plan of things beforehand laid out, which, from the nature of it, requires various ſyſtems of means, as well as length of time, in order to the carrying on its ſeveral parts into execution. Thus, in the daily Courſe of natural Providence, God operates in the very ſame manner, as in the Diſpenſation of Chriſtianity: making one thing ſubſervient to another; This, to ſomewhat farther; and ſo on, through a progreſſive ſeries of means, which extend, both backward and forward, beyond our utmoſt view. Of this manner of operation, every thing we ſee in the Courſe of Nature, is as much an inſtance, as any part of the Chriſtian Diſpenſation.

PART II.

CHAP. V.

Of the particular Syſtem of Chriſtianity; the Appointment of a Mediator, and the Redemption of the world by him.

THERE is not, I think, any thing relating to Chriſtianity, which has been more objected againſt, than the Mediation of Chriſt, in ſome or other of its parts. Yet, upon thorough conſideration, there ſeems nothing leſs juſtly liable to it. For,

I. THE whole Analogy of Nature removes all imagined preſumption againſt the general notion of *a Mediator between God and Man**. For we find all living creatures are brought into the world, and their life and infancy is preſerved, by the inſtrumentality of others: And every ſatisfaction of it, ſome way or other, is beſtowed by the like means. So that the viſible Government, which God exerciſes over the world, is by the inſtrumentality and mediation of others. And how far his inviſible government be or be not ſo, it is impoſſible to determine at all by Reaſon. And the ſuppoſition, that part of it is ſo, appears, to ſay the leaſt, altogether as credible, as the contrary. There is then no ſort of objection, from the light of Nature, againſt the

* Tim. ii. 5.

general notion of a Mediator between God and Man, conſidered as a doctrine of Chriſtianity, or as an appointment in this diſpenſation: ſince we find by Experience, that God does appoint mediators, to be the inſtruments of good and evil to us; the inſtruments of his juſtice and his mercy. And the objection here referred to is urged, not againſt Mediation in that high, eminent and peculiar ſenſe, in which Chriſt is our Mediator; but abſolutely againſt the whole notion itſelf of a Mediator at all.

II. As we muſt ſuppoſe, that the world is under the proper moral government of God, or in a ſtate of religion, before we can enter into conſideration of the revealed doctrine, concerning the redemption of it by Chriſt; ſo that ſuppoſition is here to be diſtinctly taken notice of. Now the divine moral government which religion teaches us, implies, that the conſequence of vice ſhall be miſery, in ſome future ſtate, by the righteous judgment of God. That ſuch conſequent puniſhment ſhall take effect by his appointment, is neceſſarily implied. But, as it is not in any ſort to be ſuppoſed, that we are made acquainted with all the ends or reaſons, for which it is fit future puniſhments ſhould be inflicted, or why God has appointed, ſuch and ſuch conſequent miſery ſhould follow vice; and as we are altogether in the dark, how or in what manner it ſhall follow, by what immediate occaſions, or by the inſtrumentality of what means; there is no abſurdity in ſuppoſing, it may follow in a way analogous to that, in which many miſeries follow ſuch and ſuch courſes of action at preſent; poverty, ſickneſs, infamy, un-

timely death by diſeaſes, death from the hands of civil juſtice. There is no abſurdity in ſuppoſing future puniſhment may follow wickedneſs of courſe, as we ſpeak, or in the way of natural conſequence from God's original conſtitution of the world; from the nature He has given us, and from the condition in which he places us: or in a like manner, as a perſon raſhly trifling upon a precipice, in the way of natural conſequence, falls down; in the way of natural conſequence, breaks his limbs, ſuppoſe; in the way of natural conſequence to this, without help, periſhes.

Some good men may perhaps be offended, with hearing it ſpoken of as a ſuppoſeable thing, that the future puniſhments of wickedneſs may be in the way of natural conſequence: as if this were taking the execution of juſtice out of the hands of God, and giving it to nature. But they ſhould remember, that when things come to paſs according to the Courſe of Nature, this does not hinder them from being His doing, who is the God of nature: And that the ſcripture aſcribes thoſe puniſhments to divine juſtice, which are known to be natural; and which muſt be called ſo, when diſtinguiſhed from ſuch as are miraculous. But after all, this ſuppoſition, or rather this way of ſpeaking, is here made uſe of only by way of illuſtration of the ſubject before us. For ſince it muſt be admitted, that the future puniſhment of wickedneſs is not a matter of arbitrary appointment, but of reaſon, equity and juſtice; it comes, for aught I ſee, to the ſame thing, whether it is ſuppoſed to be inflicted in a way analo-

gous to that, in which the temporal puniſhments of vice and folly are inflicted, or in any other way. And though there were a difference, it is allowable, in the preſent caſe, to make this ſuppoſition, plainly not an incredible one; that future puniſhment may follow wickedneſs in the way of natural conſequence, or according to ſome general laws of government already eſtabliſhed in the univerſe.

III. Upon this ſuppoſition, or even without it, we may obſerve ſomewhat, much to the preſent purpoſe, in the Conſtitution of Nature or appointments of Providence: the proviſion which is made, that all the bad natural conſequences of mens actions, ſhould not always actually follow; or that ſuch bad conſequences, as, according to the ſettled courſe of things, would inevitably have followed if not prevented, ſhould in certain degrees, be prevented. We are apt preſumptuouſly to imagine, that the world might have been ſo conſtituted, as that there would not have been any ſuch thing as miſery or evil. On the contrary we find the Author of nature permits it: but then he has provided reliefs, and, in many caſes, perfect remedies for it, after ſome pains and difficulties: reliefs and remedies even for that evil, which is the fruit of our own miſconduct; and which, in the courſe of nature, would have continued, and ended in our deſtruction, but for ſuch remedies. And this is an inſtance, both of ſeverity and indulgence, in the Conſtitution of Nature. Thus all the bad conſequences, now mentioned, of a man's trifling upon a precipice, might be prevented. And though all were not, yet ſome of them

might, by proper interpoſition, if not rejected: by another's coming to the raſh man's relief, with his own laying hold on that relief, in ſuch ſort as the caſe required. Perſons may do a great deal themſelves towards preventing the bad conſequences of their follies: and more may be done by themſelves, together with the aſſiſtance of others their fellow-creatures; which aſſiſtance nature requires and prompts us to. This is the general conſtitution of the world. Now ſuppoſe it had been ſo conſtituted, that after ſuch actions were done, as were foreſeen naturally to draw after them miſery to the doer, it ſhould have been no more in human power to have prevented that naturally conſequent miſery, in any inſtance, than it is, in all; no one can ſay, whether ſuch a more ſevere conſtitution of things might not yet have been really good. But, that on the contrary, proviſion is made by Nature, that we may and do, to ſo great degree, prevent the bad natural effects of our follies; this may be called mercy or compaſſion in the original conſtitution of the world: compaſſion, as diſtinguiſhed from goodneſs in general. And, the whole known conſtitution and courſe of things affording us inſtances of ſuch compaſſion, it would be according to the analogy of nature, to hope, that, however ruinous the natural conſequences of vice might be, from the general laws of God's government over the univerſe; yet proviſion might be made, poſſibly might have been originally made, for preventing thoſe ruinous conſequences from inevitably following: at leaſt from following univerſally, and in all caſes.

MANY, I am ſenſible, will wonder at finding this made a queſtion, or ſpoken of as in any degree doubtful. The generality of mankind are ſo far from having that awful ſenſe of things, which the preſent ſtate of vice and miſery and darkneſs ſeems to make but reaſonable, that they have ſcarce any apprehenſion or thought at all about this matter, any way: and ſome ſerious perſons may have ſpoken unadviſedly concerning it. But let us obſerve, what we experience to be, and what, from the very Conſtitution of Nature, cannot but be, the conſequences of irregular and diſorderly behaviour; even of ſuch raſhneſs, wilfulneſs, neglects, as we ſcarce call vicious. Now it is natural to apprehend, that the bad conſequences of irregularity will be greater, in proportion as the irregularity is ſo. And there is no compariſon between theſe irregularities, and the greater inſtances of vice, or a diſſolute profligate diſregard to all religion; if there be any thing at all in religion. For conſider what it is for creatures, moral agents, preſumptuouſly to introduce that confuſion and miſery into the Kingdom of God, which mankind have in fact introduced; to blaſpheme the ſovereign Lord of all; to contemn his authority; to be injurious, to the degree they are, to their fellow-creatures, the creatures of God. Add that the effects of vice in the preſent world, are often extreme miſery, irretrievable ruin, and even death. And upon putting all this together, it will appear, that as no one can ſay, in what degree fatal, the unprevented conſequences of vice may be, according to the general rule of divine government; ſo it is by no means intuitively certain, how far

these consequences could possibly, in the nature of the thing, be prevented, consistently with the eternal rule of right, or with what is, in fact, the moral constitution of nature. However, there would be large ground to hope, that the universal government was not so severely strict, but that there was room for pardon, or for having those penal consequences prevented. Yet,

IV. There seems no probability, that any thing we could do, would alone and of itself prevent them: prevent their following, or being inflicted. But one would think, at least, it were impossible, that the contrary should be thought certain. For we are not acquainted with the whole of the case. We are not informed of all the reasons, which render it fit that future punishments should be inflicted: and therefore cannot know, whether any thing we could do, would make such an alteration, as to render it fit that they should be remitted. We do not know, what the whole natural or appointed consequences of vice are; nor in what way they would follow, if not prevented: and therefore can in no sort say, whether we could do any thing, which would be sufficient to prevent them. Our ignorance being thus manifest, let us recollect the Analogy of Nature or Providence. For, though this may be but a slight ground to raise a positive opinion upon, in this matter; yet it is sufficient to answer a mere arbitrary assertion, without any kind of evidence, urged by way of objection against a doctrine, the proof of which is not reason, but revelation. Consider then: People ruin their fortunes by extrava-

gance; they bring diſeaſes upon themſelves by exceſs; they incur the penalties of civil laws, and ſurely civil government is natural: will ſorrow for theſe follies paſt, and behaving well for the future alone and of itſelf, prevent the natural conſequences of them? On the contrary, men's natural abilities of helping themſelves, are often impaired: Or if not, yet they are forced to be beholden to the aſſiſtance of others, upon ſeveral accounts, and in different ways: Aſſiſtance which they would have had no occaſion for, had it not been for this miſconduct, but which, in the diſadvantageous condition they have reduced themſelves to, is abſolutely neceſſary to their recovery, and retrieving their affairs. Now ſince this is our caſe, conſidering ourſelves merely as inhabitants of this world, and as having a temporal intereſt here, under the natural government of God, which however has a great deal moral in it: Why is it not ſuppoſeable, that this may be our caſe alſo, in our more important capacity, as under his perfect moral government, and having a more general and future intereſt depending? If we have miſbehaved in this higher capacity, and rendered ourſelves obnoxious to the future puniſhment, which God has annexed to vice: it is plainly credible, that behaving well for the time to come, may be——not uſeleſs, God forbid———but wholly inſufficient alone and of itſelf, to prevent that puniſhment; or to put us in the condition, which we ſhould have been in, had we preſerved our innocence.

And though we ought to reaſon with all reverence, whenever we reaſon concerning the divine

conduct: yet it may be added, that it is clearly contrary to all our notions of government, as well as to what is, in fact, the general conſtitution of nature, to ſuppoſe that doing well for the future, ſhould, in all caſes, prevent all the judicial bad conſequences of having done evil, or all the puniſhment annexed to diſobedience. And we have manifeſtly nothing from whence to determine, in what degree, and in what caſes, reformation would prevent this puniſhment, even ſuppoſing that it would in ſome. And though the efficacy of repentance itſelf alone, to prevent what mankind had rendered themſelves obnoxious to, and recover what they had forfeited, is now inſiſted upon, in oppoſition to Chriſtianity; yet, by the general prevalence of propitiatory ſacrifices over the heathen world, this notion, of repentance alone being ſufficient to expiate guilt, appears to be contrary to the general ſenſe of mankind.

Upon the whole then: Had the laws, the general laws of God's government, been permitted to operate, without any interpoſition in our behalf, the future puniſhment, for aught we know to the contrary, or have any reaſon to think, muſt inevitably have followed, notwithſtanding any thing we could have done to prevent it. Now,

V. In this darkneſs, or this light of nature, call it which you pleaſe, Revelation comes in; confirms every doubting fear, which could enter into the heart of man, concerning the future unprevented

conſequence of wickedneſs; ſuppoſes the world to be in a ſtate of ruin; (a ſuppoſition which ſeems the very ground of the Chriſtian diſpenſation, and which, if not proveable by reaſon, yet is in no wiſe contrary to it;) teaches us too, that the rules of Divine government are ſuch, as not to admit of pardon immediately and directly upon repentance, or by the ſole efficacy of it; But then teaches at the ſame time, what Nature might juſtly have hoped, that the moral government of the univerſe was not ſo rigid, but that there was room for an interpoſition, to avert the fatal conſequences of vice; which therefore, by this means, does admit of pardon. Revelation teaches us, that the unknown laws of God's more genera government, no leſs than the particular laws by which we experience he governs us at preſent, are compaſſionate*, as well as good in the more general notion of goodneſs: And that he hath mercifully provided, that there ſhould be an interpoſition to prevent the deſtruction of human kind; whatever that deſtruction unprevented would have been. *God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoſoever believeth*, not, to be ſure, in a ſpeculative, but in a practical ſenſe, *that whoſoever believeth in him, ſhould not periſh*†: Gave his Son in the ſame way of goodneſs to the world, as he affords particular perſons the friendly aſſiſtance of their fellow-creatures; when, without it, their temporal ruin would be the certain conſequence of their follies: in the ſame way of goodneſs, I ſay; though in a tranſcendent

* Pag. 236. &c. † Joh. iii. 16.

and infinitely higher degree. And the Son of God *loved us and gave himself for us*, with a love, which he himself compares to that of human friendſhip: though, in this caſe, all compariſons muſt fall infinitely ſhort of the thing intended to be illuſtrated by them. He interpoſed in ſuch a manner, as was neceſſary and effectual to prevent that execution of juſtice upon ſinners, which God had appointed ſhould otherwiſe have been executed upon them: Or in ſuch a manner, as to prevent that puniſhment from actually following, which, according to the general laws of divine government, muſt have followed the ſins of the world, had it not been for ſuch interpoſition*.

* It cannot, I ſuppoſe, be imagined, even by the moſt curſory reader, that it is, in any ſort, affirmed or implied in any thing ſaid in this chapter, that none can have the benefit of the general redemption, but ſuch as have the advantage of being made acquainted with it in the preſent life. But, it may be needful to mention, that ſeveral queſtions, which have been brought into the ſubject before us, and determined, are not in the leaſt entered into here: queſtions which have been, I fear, raſhly determined, and perhaps with equal raſhneſs contrary ways. For inſtance, whether God could have ſaved the world by other means than the death of Chriſt, conſiſtently with the general laws of his government. And had not Chriſt come into the world, what would have been the future condition of the better ſort of men; thoſe juſt perſons over the face of the earth, for whom, Manaſſes in his prayer aſſerts, repentance was not appointed. The meaning of the firſt of theſe queſtions is greatly ambiguous. And neither of them can properly be anſwered, without going upon that infinitely abſurd ſuppoſition, that we know the whole of the caſe. And perhaps the very inquiry, *What would have followed if God had not done as he has*, may

If any thing here ſaid, ſhould appear, upon firſt thought, inconſiſtent with Divine goodneſs, a ſecond, I am perſuaded, will intirely remove that appearance. For were we to ſuppoſe the conſtitution of things to be ſuch, as that the whole creation muſt have periſhed, had it not been for ſomewhat, which God had appointed ſhould be, in order to prevent that ruin: even this ſuppoſition would not be inconſiſtent, in any degree, with the moſt abſolutely perfect goodneſs. But ſtill it may be thought, that this whole manner of treating the ſubject before us, ſuppoſes mankind to be naturally in a very ſtrange ſtate. And truly ſo it does. But it is not Chriſtianity, which has put us into this ſtate. Whoever will conſider the manifold miſeries, and the extreme wickedneſs of the world: that the beſt have great wrongneſſes within themſelves, which they complain of, and endeavour to amend; but that the generality grow more profligate and corrupt with age: that heathen moraliſts thought the preſent ſtate to be a ſtate of puniſhment: and, what might be added, that the earth our habitation has the appearances of being a ruin: whoever, I ſay, will conſider all theſe, and ſome other obvious things, will think he has little reaſon to object againſt the Scripture account, that mankind is in a ſtate of degradation; againſt this being the fact: how difficult ſoever he may think it to account for, or even to form a diſtinct conception of the occaſions and circumſtances of it. But that the

have in it ſome very great impropriety: and ought not to be carried on any farther, than is neceſſary to help our partial and inadequate conceptions of things.

crime of our firſt parents was the occaſion of our being placed in a more diſadvantageous condition, is a thing throughout and particularly analogous to what we ſee, in the daily courſe of natural providence; as the recovery of the world by the interpoſition of Chriſt, has been ſhewn to be ſo in general.

VI. The particular manner in which Chriſt interpoſed in the redemption of the world, or his office as *Mediator*, in the largeſt ſenſe, *between God and man*, is thus repreſented to us in the Scripture. *He is the light of the world* *; the revealer of the will of God in the moſt eminent ſenſe. He is a propitiatory ſacrifice †; *the Lamb of God* ‡: and, as he voluntarily offered himſelf up, he is ſtiled our high-prieſt §. And, which ſeems of peculiar weight, he is deſcribed before-hand in the Old Teſtament, under the ſame characters of a prieſt, and an expiatory victim **. And whereas it is objected, that all this is merely by way of alluſion to the ſacrifices of the Moſaic law, the apoſtle on the contrary affirms, that the *Law was a ſhadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things* ††, and that *the prieſts that offer gifts according to the law —ſerve according unto the example and ſhadow of heavenly things, as Moſes was admoniſhed of God,*

* John i. and viii. 12. † Rom. iii. 25. and v. 11. Cor. v. 7. Eph. v. 2. 1 Joh. ii. 2. Matth. xxvi. 28.

‡ Joh. i. 29. 36. and throughout the book of Revelation.

§ Throughout the epiſtle to the Hebrews. ** Iſa. liii. Dan. ix. 24. Pſalm cx. 4. †† Heb. x. 1.

when he was about to make the tabernacle. For ſee, ſaith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern ſhewed to thee in the mount *. *i. e.* The Levitical prieſthood was a ſhadow of the prieſthood of Chriſt; in like manner as the tabernacle made by Moſes, was according to that ſhewed him in the mount. The prieſthood of Chriſt, and the tabernacle in the mount, were the originals: of the former of which, the Levitical prieſthood was a type; and of the latter, the tabernacle made by Moſes was a copy. The doctrine of this epiſtle then plainly is, that the legal ſacrifices were alluſions to the great and final atonement, to be made by the blood of Chriſt; and not that this was an alluſion to thoſe. Nor can any thing be more expreſs and determinate, than the following paſſage. *It is not poſſible that the blood of bulls and of goats ſhould take away ſin. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he ſaith, Sacrifice and offering*, i. e. of bulls and of goats, *thou wouldeſt not, but a body haſt thou prepared me. ———Lo I come to do thy will, O God———By which will we are ſanctified, through the offering of the body of Jeſus Chriſt once for all* †. And to add one paſſage more of the like kind: *Chriſt was once offered to bear the ſins of many; and unto them that look for him ſhall he appear the ſecond time, without ſin*; i. e. without bearing ſin, as he did at his firſt coming, by being an offering for it; without having our *iniquities* again *laid upon him*, without being any more a ſin-offering:———*unto them that look for him ſhall he appear the ſecond time,*

* Heb. vii. 4, 5. † Heb. x. 4, 5, 7, 9, 10.

without ſin, unto ſalvation *. Nor do the inſpired writers at all confine themſelves to this manner of ſpeaking concerning the ſatisfaction of Chriſt; but declare an efficacy in what he did and ſuffered for us, additional to and beyond mere inſtruction, example and government, in great variety of expreſſion: *That Jeſus ſhould die for that nation* the Jews: *And not for that nation only, but that alſo,* plainly by the efficacy of his death, *he ſhould gather together in one, the children of God that were ſcattered abroad* †: That *he ſuffered for ſins, the juſt for the unjuſt* ‡: That *he gave his life, himſelf, a ranſom* §: That *we are bought, bought with a price* **: That *he redeemed us with his blood; redeemed us from the curſe of the law, being made a curſe for us* ††: That he is our *advocate, interceſſor* and *propitiation*: ‡‡ That *he was made perfect,* or conſummate, *through ſufferings; and being* thus *made perfect, he became the author of ſalvation* *†: That *God was in Chriſt reconciling the world to himſelf; by the death of his Son, by the croſs; not imputing their treſpaſſes unto them* *‡ And laſtly, that *through death he deſtroyed him that had the power of death.* ** Chriſt then having thus *humbled himſelf, and become obedient to death, even the death of the croſs; God alſo hath highly exalted him, and given him a name*

* Heb. ix. 28.

† Joh. xi. 51, 52. ‡ 1 Pet. iii. 18. § Matth. xx. 28. Mark x. 45. 1 Tim. ii. 6. ** 2 Pet. ii. 1. Rev. xiv. 4 1 Cor. vi. 20. †† 1 Pet i. 19. Rev. v. 9. Gal. iii. 13.

‡‡ Heb. vii. 25. Joh. ii. 1, 2. *† Heb. ii. 10. and v. 9.

*‡ 2 Cor. v. 19. Rom. v. 10. Eph. ii. 16. ** Heb. ix. 14.

See alſo a remarkable paſſage in the book of Job, xxxiii. 24.

which is above every name: hath given all things into his hands: hath committed all judgment unto him; that all men ſhould honour the Son, even as they honour the Father *. For, *Worthy is the Lamb that was ſlain, to receive power, and riches, and wiſdom, and ſtrength, and honour, and glory, and bleſſing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, heard I, ſaying, Bleſſing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto him that ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever* †.

These paſſages of ſcripture ſeem to comprehend and expreſs the chief parts of Chriſt's office, as Mediator between God and man, ſo far, I mean, as the nature of this his office is revealed; and it is uſually treated of by divines under three heads.

Firſt, He was, by way of eminence, The Prophet: *That prophet that ſhould come into the world* ‡, to declare the Divine will. He publiſhed anew the Law of Nature, which men had corrupted; and the very knowledge of which to ſome degree, was loſt among them. He taught mankind, taught us authoritatively, to *live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in this preſent world*, in expectation of the future judgment of God. He confirmed the truth of this moral ſyſtem of nature, and gave us additional evidence of it; the evidence of teſtimony **. He diſ-

* Phil. ii. 8, 9. John iii. 35. and v. 22, 23.
† Rev. v. 12, 13. ‡ John vi 14.
** Pag. 175, &c.

tinctly revealed, the manner in which God would be worſhipped, the efficacy of repentance, and the rewards and puniſhments of a future life. Thus he was a prophet in a ſenſe, in which no other ever was. To which is to be added, that he ſet us a perfect *example that we ſhould follow his ſteps.*

Secondly, He has a *kingdom which is not of this world.* He founded a church, to be to mankind a ſtanding memorial of religion, and invitation to it; which he promiſed to be with always even to the end. He exerciſes an inviſible government over it, himſelf, and by his Spirit: Over that part of it, which is militant here on earth, a government of diſcipline, *for the perfecting of the ſaints, for the edifying of his body: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the meaſure of the ſtature of the fulneſs of Chriſt**. Of this church, all perſons ſcattered over the world, who live in obedience to his laws, are members. For theſe he is *gone to prepare a place*, and *will come again to receive them unto himſelf, that where he is, there they may be alſo: and reign with him for ever and ever*†: and likewiſe *to take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not his goſpel*‡.

AGAINST theſe parts of Chriſt's office, I find no objections, but what are fully obviated in the beginning of this chapter.

* Eph. iv. 12, 13.

† John xiv. 2, 3. Rev. iii. 21. and xi. 15. ‡ 2 Theſſ. i. 8.

Laſtly, CHRIST offered himſelf a propitiatory ſacrifice, and made atonement for the ſins of the world: Which is mentioned laſt, in regard to what is objected againſt it. Sacrifices of expiation were commanded the Jews, and obtained amongſt moſt other nations, from tradition, whoſe original probably was Revelation. And they were continually repeated, both occaſionally, and at the returns of ſtated times; and made up great part of the external religion of mankind. *But now once in the end of the world Chriſt appeared to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf**. And this ſacrifice was, in the higheſt degree and with the moſt extenſive influence, of that efficacy for obtaining pardon of ſin, which the heathens may be ſuppoſed to have thought their ſacrifices to have been, and which the Jewiſh ſacrifices really were in ſome degree, and with regard to ſome perſons.

How and in what particular way it had this efficacy, there are not wanting perſons who have endeavoured to explain: but I do not find that the Scripture has explained it. We ſeem to be very much in the dark, concerning the manner in which the ancients underſtood atonement to be made, *i. e.* Pardon to be obtained by ſacrifices. And if the Scripture has, as ſurely it has, left this matter of the ſatisfaction of Chriſt myſterious, leſt ſomewhat in it unrevealed, all conjectures about it muſt be, if not evidently abſurd, yet at leaſt uncertain. Nor has any one reaſon to complain for want of farther information, unleſs he can ſhew his claim to it.

* Heb. ix. 26.

Some have endeavoured to explain the efficacy of what Chriſt has done and ſuffered for us, beyond what the Scripture has authorized: Others, probably becauſe they could not explain it, have been for taking it away, and confining his office as Redeemer of the world, to his inſtruction, example and government of the church. Whereas the doctrine of the goſpel appears to be; not only that he taught the efficacy of repentance, but rendered it of the efficacy which it is, by what he did and ſuffered for us: That he obtained for us the benefit of having our repentance accepted unto eternal life: Not only that he revealed to ſinners, that they were in a capacity of ſalvation, and how they might obtain it; but moreover that he put them into this capacity of ſalvation, by what he did and ſuffered for them; put us into a capacity of eſcaping future puniſhment, and obtaining future happineſs. And it is our wiſdom thankfully to accept the benefit, by performing the conditions, upon which it is offered, on our part, without diſputing how it was procured, on His. For,

VII. Since we neither know, by what means puniſhment in a future ſtate would have followed wickedneſs in this; nor in what manner it would have been inflicted, had it not been prevented; nor all the reaſons why its infliction would have been needful; nor the particular nature of that ſtate of happineſs, which Chriſt is gone to prepare for his diſciples: And ſince we are ignorant how far any thing which we could do, would, alone and of it-

ſelf, have been effectual to prevent that puniſhment, to which we were obnoxious, and recover that happineſs, which we had forfeited; it is moſt evident we are not judges, antecedently to Revelation, whether a Mediator, was or was not neceſſary, to obtain thoſe ends: to prevent that future puniſhment, and bring mankind to the final happineſs of their nature. And for the very ſame reaſons, upon ſuppoſition of the neceſſity of a Mediator, we are no more judges, antecedently to Revelation, of the whole nature of his office, or the ſeveral parts of which it conſiſts; of what was fit and requiſite to be aſſigned him, in order to accompliſh the ends of divine providence in the appointment. And from hence it follows, that to object againſt the expediency or uſefulneſs of particular things, revealed to have been done or ſuffered by him, becauſe we do not ſee how they were conducive to thoſe ends; is highly abſurd. Yet nothing is more common to be met with, than this abſurdity. But if it be acknowledged beforehand, that we are not judges in the caſe, it is evident that no objection can, with any ſhadow of reaſon, be urged againſt any particular part of Chriſt's mediatorial office revealed in Scripture, till it can be ſhewn poſitively, not to be requiſite or conducive to the ends propoſed to be accompliſhed; or that it is in itſelf unreaſonable.

And there is one objection made againſt the ſatisfaction of Chriſt, which looks to be of this poſitive kind: that the doctrine of His being appointed to ſuffer for the ſins of the world, repreſents God as

being indifferent whether he punished the innocent or the guilty. Now from the foregoing observations we may see the extream slightness of all such objections; and (though it is most certain all who make them do not see the consequence) that they conclude altogether as much against God's whole original constitution of nature, and the whole daily course of Divine providence in the government of the world, *i. e.* against the whole scheme of Theism and the whole notion of religion; as against Christianity. For the world is a constitution or system, whose parts have a mutual reference to each other: and there is a scheme of things gradually carrying on, called the course of nature, to the carrying on of which, God has appointed us, in various ways, to contribute. And when, in the daily course of natural providence, it is appointed that innocent people should suffer for the faults of the guilty, this is liable to the very same objection, as the instance we are now considering. The infinitely greater importance of that appointment of Christianity which is objected against, does not hinder but it may be, as it plainly is, an appointment of the very same kind, with what the world affords us daily examples of. Nay if there were any force at all in the objection, it would be stronger, in one respect, against natural providence, than against Christianity: because under the former, we are in many cases commanded, and even necessitated whether we will or no, to suffer for the faults of others; whereas the sufferings of Christ were voluntary. The world's being under the righteous government of God, does indeed imply, that finally and upon

the whole every one ſhall receive according to his perſonal deſerts: And the general doctrine of the whole Scripture is, that this ſhall be the completion of the Divine government. But during the progreſs, and, for aught we know, even in order to the completion of this moral ſcheme, vicarious puniſhments may be fit, and abſolutely neceſſary. Men by their follies run themſelves into extream diſtreſs: into difficulties which would be abſolutely fatal to them, were it not for the interpoſition and aſſiſtance of others. God commands by the law of nature, that we afford them this aſſiſtance, in many caſes where we cannot do it without very great pains, and labour, and ſufferings to our ſelves. And we ſee in what variety of ways, one perſon's ſufferings contribute to the relief of another: and how, or by what particular means, this comes to paſs or follows, from the conſtitution and laws of Nature, which come under our notice: and, being familiarized to it, men are not ſhocked with it. So that the reaſon of their inſiſting upon objections of the foregoing kind againſt the ſatisfaction of Chriſt, is, either that they do not conſider God's ſettled and uniform appointments as His appointments at all: Or elſe, they forget that vicarious puniſhment is a providential appointment of every day's experience: And then, from their being unacquainted with the more general laws of nature or Divine government over the world, and not ſeeing how the ſufferings of Chriſt could contribute to the redemption of it, unleſs by arbitrary and tyrannical will; they conclude his ſufferings could not contribute to it any other way. And yet, what has been often alledged

in juſtification of this doctrine, even from the apparent natural tendency of this method of our redemption; its tendency to vindicate the authority of God's laws, and deter His creatures from ſin; this has never yet been anſwered, and is I think plainly unanſwerable: though I am far from thinking it an account of the whole of the caſe. But without taking this into conſideration, it abundantly appears from the obſervations above made, that this objection is, not an objection againſt Chriſtianity, but againſt the whole general Conſtitution of Nature. And if it were to be conſidered as an objection againſt Chriſtianity, or conſidering it as it is, an objection againſt the Conſtitution of Nature; it amounts to no more in concluſion than this, that a Divine appointment cannot be neceſſary or expedient, becauſe the objector does not diſcern it to be ſo: though he muſt own that the nature of the caſe is ſuch, as renders him uncapable of judging, whether it be ſo or not; or of ſeeing it to be neceſſary, though it were ſo.

It is indeed a matter of great patience to reaſonable men, to find people arguing in this manner: objecting againſt the credibility of ſuch particular things revealed in Scripture, that they do not ſee the neceſſity or expediency of them. For though it is highly right, and the moſt pious exerciſe of our underſtanding, to enquire with due reverence into the ends and reaſons of God's diſpenſations: Yet when thoſe reaſons are concealed, to argue from our Ignorance, that ſuch diſpenſations cannot be

from God, is infinitely abſurd. The preſumption of this kind of objections, ſeems almoſt loſt in the folly of them. And the folly of them is yet greater, when they are urged, as uſually they are, againſt things in Chriſtianity analogous or like to thoſe natural diſpenſations of providence, which are matter of experience. Let reaſon be kept to: and if any part of the ſcripture-account of the redemption of the world by Chriſt, can be ſhewn to be really contrary to it, let the ſcripture, in the name of God, be given up: But let not ſuch poor creatures as we, go on objecting againſt an infinite ſcheme, that we do not ſee the neceſſity or uſefulneſs of all its parts, and call this reaſoning; And, which ſtill farther heightens the abſurdity in the preſent caſe, parts which we are not actively concerned in. For it may be worth mentioning,

Laſtly, THAT not only the reaſon of the thing, but the whole analogy of Nature, ſhould teach us, not to expect to have the like information concerning the Divine conduct, as concerning our own duty. God inſtructs us by experience, (for it is not reaſon, but experience which inſtructs us) what good or bad conſequences will follow from our acting in ſuch and ſuch manners: and by this he directs us, how we are to behave ourſelves. But, though we are ſufficiently inſtructed for the common purpoſes of life: yet it is but an almoſt infinitely ſmall part of natural providence, which we are at all let into. The caſe is the ſame with regard to Revelation. The doctrine of a Mediator between God and man, againſt which it is objected, that the

expediency of ſome things in it is not underſtood, relates only to what was done on God's part in the appointment, and on the Mediator's in the execution of it. For what is required of us, in conſequence of this gracious diſpenſation, is another ſubject, in which none can complain for want of information. The conſtitution of the world and God's natural government over it, is all myſtery, as much as the Chriſtian diſpenſation. Yet under the firſt, he has given men all things pertaining to life; and under the other, all things pertaining unto godlineſs. And it may be added, that there is nothing hard to be accounted for in any of the common precepts of Chriſtianity: though if there were, ſurely a Divine command is abundantly ſufficient to lay us under the ſtrongeſt obligations to obedience. But the fact is, that the reaſons of all the Chriſtian precepts are evident. Poſitive inſtitutions are manifeſtly neceſſary to keep up and propagate religion amongſt mankind. And our duty to Chriſt, the internal and external worſhip of him; this part of the religion of the goſpel, manifeſtly ariſes out of what he has done and ſuffered, his authority and dominion, and the relation, which he is revealed to ſtand in to us *.

* Page 181. &c.

PART II.

CHAP. VI.

Of the want of univerſality in revelation: and of the ſuppoſed deficiency in the proof of it.

IT has been thought by ſome perſons, that if the evidence of Revelation appears doubtful, this itſelf turns into a poſitive argument againſt it: becauſe it cannot be ſuppoſed, that if it were true, it would be left to ſubſiſt upon doubtful evidence. And the objection againſt Revelation from its not being univerſal, is often inſiſted upon as of great weight.

Now the weakneſs of theſe opinions may be ſhewn, by obſerving the ſuppoſitions on which they are founded: Which are really ſuch as theſe; that it cannot be thought God would have beſtowed any favour at all upon us, unleſs in the degree, which, we think, he might, and which, we imagine, would be moſt to our particular advantage; and alſo that it cannot be thought he would beſtow a favour upon any, unleſs he beſtowed the ſame upon all: ſuppoſitions which we find contradicted, not by a few inſtances in God's natural government of the world, but by the general analogy of nature together.

Persons who ſpeak of the evidence of religion as doubtful, and of this ſuppoſed doubtfulneſs as a poſitive argument againſt it, ſhould be put upon conſidering, what that evidence indeed is, which they act upon with regard to their temporal intereſts. For, it is not only extreamly difficult, but, in many caſes, abſolutely impoſſible, to balance pleaſure and pain, ſatisfaction and uneaſineſs, ſo as to be able to ſay, on which ſide the overplus is. There are the like difficulties and impoſſibilities in making the due allowances, for a change of temper and taſte, for ſatiety, diſguſts, ill-health: any of which render men incapable of injoying, after they have obtained, what they moſt eagerly deſired. Numberleſs too are the accidents, beſides that one of untimely death, which may even probably diſappoint the beſt concerted ſchemes: And ſtrong objections are often ſeen to lie againſt them, not to be removed or anſwered, but which ſeem overbalanced by reaſons on the other ſide; ſo as that the certain difficulties and dangers of the purſuit are, by every one, thought juſtly diſregarded, upon account of the appearing greater advantages in caſe of ſucceſs, though there be but little probability of it. Laſtly, every one obſerves our liableneſs, if we be not upon our guard, to be deceived by the falſhood of men, and the falſe appearances of things: And this danger muſt be greatly increaſed, if there be a ſtrong bias within, ſuppoſe from indulged paſſion, to favour the deceit. Hence ariſes that great uncertainty and doubtfulneſs of proof, wherein our temporal intereſt really conſiſts; what are the moſt probable means of attaining it; and whether thoſe means will eventually be

ſucceſsful. And numberleſs inſtances there are, in the daily courſe of life, in which all men think it reaſonable to engage in purſuits, though the probability is greatly againſt ſucceeding; and to make ſuch proviſion for themſelves, as it is ſuppoſeable they may have occaſion for, though the plain acknowledged probability is, that they never ſhall. Then thoſe who think the objection againſt revelation, from its light not being univerſal, to be of weight, ſhould obſerve, that the Author of Nature, in numberleſs inſtances, beſtows that upon ſome, which he does not upon others, who ſeem equally to ſtand in need of it. Indeed he appears to beſtow all his gifts, with the moſt promiſcuous variety, among creatures of the ſame ſpecies: health and ſtrength, capacities of prudence and of knowledge, means of improvement, riches, and all external advantages. And as there are not any two men found, of exactly like ſhape and features: ſo it is probable there are not any two, of an exactly like conſtitution, temper and ſituation, with regard to the goods and evils of life. Yet, notwithſtanding theſe uncertainties and varieties, God does exerciſe a natural government over the world: and there is ſuch a thing as a prudent and imprudent inſtitution of life, with regard to our health and our affairs, under that his natural government.

As neither the Jewiſh nor Chriſtian revelation have been univerſal; and as they have been afforded to a greater or leſs part of the world, at different times: ſo likewiſe, at different times, both revelations have had different degrees of evidence.

The Jews who lived during the ſucceſſion of prophets, that is, from Moſes till after the captivity, had higher evidence of the truth of their religion, than thoſe had, who lived in the interval between the laſt mentioned period, and the coming of Chriſt. And the firſt Chriſtians had higher evidence of the miracles wrought in atteſtation of Chriſtianity, than what we have now. They had alſo a ſtrong preſumptive proof of the truth of it, perhaps of much greater force, in way of argument, than many think, of which we have very little remaining; I mean the preſumptive proof of its truth, from the influence which it had upon the lives of the generality of its profeſſors. And we, or future ages, may poſſibly have a proof of it, which they could not have, from the conformity between the prophetic hiſtory, and the ſtate of the world and of Chriſtianity. And farther: if we were to ſuppoſe the evidence, which ſome have of religion, to amount to little more, than ſeeing that it may be true; but that they remain in great doubts and uncertainties about both its evidence and its nature, and great perplexities concerning the rule of life: Others to have a full conviction of the truth of religion, with a diſtinct knowledge of their duty: and others ſeverally to have all the intermediate degrees of religious light and evidence, which lie between theſe two———If we put the caſe, that for the preſent, it was intended, revelation ſhould be no more than a ſmall light, in the midſt of a world greatly overſpread, notwithſtanding it, with ignorance and darkneſs: that certain glimmerings of this light ſhould extend, and be directed, to remote diſtances, in ſuch a manner as

that thoſe who really partook of it, ſhould not diſcern from whence it originally came: that ſome in a nearer ſituation to it, ſhould have its light obſcured, and, in different ways and degrees, intercepted: and that others ſhould be placed within its clearer influence, and be much more enlivened, cheared and directed by it; but yet that even to theſe, it ſhould be no more than *a light ſhining in a dark place:* All this would be perfectly uniform and of a piece with the conduct of Providence, in the diſtribution of its other bleſſings. If the fact of the caſe really were, that ſome have received no light at all from the ſcripture; as many ages and countries in the heathen world: that others, though they have, by means of it, had eſſential or natural religion enforced upon their conſciences, yet have never had the genuine ſcripture-revelation, with its real evidence, propoſed to their conſideration; and the antient *Perſians*, and modern *Mahometans*, may poſſibly be inſtances of people in a ſituation ſomewhat like to this: that others, though they have had the ſcripture laid before them, as of divine revelation, yet have had it with the ſyſtem and evidence of Chriſtianity ſo interpolated, the ſyſtem ſo corrupted, the evidence ſo blended with falſe miracles, as to leave the mind in the utmoſt doubtfulneſs and uncertainty about the whole; which may be the ſtate of ſome thoughtful men, in moſt of thoſe nations who call themſelves Chriſtian: And laſtly, that others have had Chriſtianity offered to them in its genuine ſimplicity, and with its proper evidence, as perſons in countries and churches of civil and of chriſtian liberty; but however that even theſe per-

ſons are left in great ignorance in many reſpects, and have by no means light afforded them enough to ſatisfy their curioſity, but only to regulate their life, to teach them their duty and encourage them in the careful diſcharge of it: I ſay, if we were to ſuppoſe this ſomewhat of a general true account of the degrees of moral and religious light and evidence, which were intended to be afforded mankind, and of what has actually been and is their ſituation, in their moral and religious capacity; there would be nothing in all this ignorance, doubtfulneſs and uncertainty, in all theſe varieties, and ſuppoſed diſadvantages of ſome in compariſon of others, reſpecting religion, but may be parallelled by manifeſt analogies in the natural diſpenſations of providence at preſent, and conſidering ourſelves merely in our temporal capacity.

Nor is there any thing ſhocking in all this, or which would ſeem to bear hard upon the moral adminiſtration in nature, if we would really keep in mind, that every one ſhall be dealt equitably with: inſtead of forgetting this, or explaining it away, after it is acknowledged in words. All ſhadow of injuſtice, and indeed all harſh appearances, in this various oeconomy of Providence, would be loſt; if we would keep in mind, that every merciful allowance ſhall be made, and no more be required of any one, than what might have been equitably expected of him, from the circumſtances in which he was placed; and not what might have been expected, had he been placed in other circumſtances: *i. e.* in Scripture language, that every man ſhall

be *accepted according to what he had, not according to what he had not* *. This however doth not by any means imply, that all perſons condition here, is equally advantageous with reſpect to futurity. And Providence's deſigning to place ſome in greater darkneſs with reſpect to religious knowledge, is no more a reaſon why they ſhould not endeavour to get out of that darkneſs, and others to bring them out of it; than why ignorant and ſlow people, in matters of other knowledge, ſhould not endeavour to learn, or ſhould not be inſtructed.

IT is not unreaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the ſame wiſe and good principle, whatever it was, which diſpoſed the Author of Nature to make different kinds and orders of creatures, diſpoſed him alſo to place creatures of like kinds, in different ſituations; and that the ſame principle which diſpoſed him to make creatures of different moral capacities, diſpoſed him alſo to place creatures of like moral capacities, in different religious ſituations; and even the ſame creatures, in different periods of their being. And the account or reaſon of this, is alſo moſt probably the account, why the conſtitution of things is ſuch, as that creatures of moral natures or capacities, for a conſiderable part of that duration in which they are living agents, are not at all ſubjects of morality and religion; but grow up to be ſo, and grow up to be ſo more and more, gradually from childhood to mature age.

* 2 Cor. viii. 12.

WHAT, in particular, is the account or reaſon of theſe things, we muſt be greatly in the dark, were it only that we know ſo very little even of our own caſe. Our preſent ſtate may poſſibly be the conſequence of ſomewhat paſt, which we are wholly ignorant of: as it has a reference to ſomewhat to come, of which we know ſcarce any more than is neceſſary for practice. A Syſtem or conſtitution, in its notion, implies Variety; and ſo complicated an one as this world, very great Variety. So that were Revelation univerſal, yet from men's different capacities of underſtanding, from the different lengths of their lives, their different educations and other external circumſtances, and from their difference of temper and bodily conſtitution; their religious ſituations would be widely different, and the diſadvantage of ſome in compariſon of others, perhaps, altogether as much as at preſent. And the true account, whatever it be, why mankind or ſuch a part of mankind are placed in this condition of ignorance, muſt be ſuppoſed alſo the true account of our farther ignorance, in not knowing the reaſons, why, or whence it is, that they are placed in this condition. But the following practical reflections may deſerve the ſerious conſideration of thoſe perſons, who think the circumſtances of mankind or their own, in the foremention'd reſpects, a ground of complaint.

Firſt, THE evidence of religion not appearing obvious, may conſtitute one particular part of ſome mens trial in the religious ſenſe: as it gives ſcope, for a virtuous exerciſe, or vitious neglect of their underſtanding, in examining, or not examining into

that evidence. There ſeems no poſſible reaſon to be given, why we may not be in a ſtate of moral probation, with regard to the exerciſe of our underſtanding upon the ſubject of religion, as we are with regard to our behaviour in common affairs. The former is as much a thing within our power and choice, as the latter. And I ſuppoſe it is to be laid down for certain, that the ſame character, the ſame inward principle, which, after a man is convinced of the truth of religion, renders him obedient to the precepts of it, would, were he not thus convinced, ſet him about an examination of it, upon its Syſtem and evidence being offered to his thoughts: And that in the latter ſtate, his examination would be with an impartiality, ſerioufneſs and ſollicitude, proportionable to what his obedience is in the former. And as inattention, negligence, want of all ſerious concern, about a matter of ſuch nature and ſuch importance, when offered to mens conſideration, is, before a diſtinct conviction of its truth, as real immoral depravity and diſſoluteneſs; as neglect of religious practice after ſuch conviction: ſo active ſollicitude about it, and fair impartial conſideration of its evidence before ſuch conviction, is as really an exerciſe of a morally right temper; as is religious practice after. Thus, that Religion is not intuitively true, but a matter of deduction and inference; that a conviction of its truth is not forced upon every one, but left to be, by ſome, collected with heedful attention to premiſes; this as much conſtitutes religious probation, as much affords ſphere, ſcope, opportunity, for right and wrong behaviour, as any thing whatever does. And their manner of

treating this ſubject when laid before them, ſhews what is in their heart, and is an exertion of it.

Secondly, IT appears to be a thing as evident, though it is not ſo much attended to, that if upon conſideration of religion, the evidence of it ſhould ſeem to any perſons doubtful, in the higheſt ſuppoſeable degree; even this doubtful evidence will, however, put them into a *general ſtate of probation* in the moral and religious ſenſe. For, ſuppoſe a man to be really in doubt, whether ſuch a perſon had not done him the greateſt favour; or, whether his whole temporal intereſt did not depend upon that perſon: No one, who had any ſenſe of gratitude and of prudence, could poſſibly conſider himſelf in the ſame ſituation with regard to ſuch perſon, as if he had no ſuch doubt. In truth, it is as juſt to ſay, that certainty and doubt are the ſame; as to ſay, the ſituations now mentioned, would leave a man as entirely at liberty in point of gratitude or prudence, as he would be, were he certain he had received no favour from ſuch perſon, or that he no way depended upon him. And thus, though the evidence of religion which is afforded to ſome men, ſhould be little more than that they are given to ſee, the ſyſtem of Chriſtianity, or religion in general, to be ſuppoſeable and credible; this ought in all reaſon to beget a ſerious practical apprehenſion, that it may be true. And even this will afford matter of exerciſe, for religious ſuſpence and deliberation, for moral reſolution and ſelf-government; becauſe the apprehenſion that religion may be true, does as really lay men under obligations, as a full conviction

that it is true. It gives occaſion and motives to conſider farther the important ſubject; to preſerve attentively upon their minds, a general implicit ſenſe that they may be under divine moral government, an awful ſollicitude about religion whether natural or revealed. Such apprehenſions ought to turn men's eyes to every degree of new light which may be had, from whatever ſide it comes; and induce them to refrain, in the mean time, from all immoralities, and live in the conſcientious practice of every common virtue. Eſpecially are they bound to keep at the greateſt diſtance from all diſſolute profaneneſs; for this the very nature of the caſe forbids; and to treat with higheſt reverence a matter, upon which their own whole intereſt and being, and the fate of nature depends. This behaviour, and an active endeavour to maintain within themſelves this temper, is the buſineſs, the duty and the wiſdom of thoſe perſons, who complain of the doubtfulneſs of religion: is what they are under the moſt proper obligations to. And ſuch behaviour is an exertion of, and has a tendency to improve in them, that character, which the practice of all the ſeveral duties of religion, from a full conviction of its truth, is an exertion of, and has a tendency to improve in others: Others, I ſay, to whom God has afforded ſuch conviction. Nay, conſidering the infinite importance of religion, revealed as well as natural, I think it may be ſaid in general, that whoever will weigh the matter thoroughly may ſee, there is not near ſo much difference, as is commonly imagined, between what ought in reaſon to be the rule of life, to thoſe perſons who are fully convinced of

its truth, and to thoſe who have only a ſerious doubting apprehenſion, that it may be true. Their hopes and fears and obligations will be in various degrees: but, as the ſubject-matter of their hopes and fears is the ſame; ſo the ſubject-matter of their obligations, what they are bound to do and to refrain from, is not ſo very unlike.

IT is to be obſerved farther, that, from a character of underſtanding, or a ſituation of influence in the world, ſome perſons have it in their power to do infinitely more harm or good, by ſetting an example of profaneneſs and avowed diſregard to all religion, or, on the contrary, of a ſerious, though perhaps doubting, apprehenſion of its truth, and of a reverend regard to it under this doubtfulneſs; than they can do, by acting well or ill in all the common intercourſes amongſt mankind. And conſequently they are moſt highly accountable for a behaviour, which, they may eaſily foreſee, is of ſuch importance, and in which there is moſt plainly a right and a wrong; even admitting the evidence of religion to be as doubtful, as is pretended.

THE ground of theſe obſervations, and that which renders them juſt and true, is, that doubting neceſſarily implies ſome degree of evidence for that, of which we doubt. For no perſon would be in doubt, concerning the truth of a number of facts ſo and ſo circumſtanced, which ſhould accidentally come into his thoughts, and of which he had no evidence at all. And though in the caſe of an even

chance, and where conſequently we were in doubt, we ſhould in common language ſay, that we had no evidence at all for either ſide; yet that ſituation of things, which renders it an even chance and no more, that ſuch an event will happen, renders this caſe equivalent to all others, where there is ſuch evidence on both ſides of a queſtion *, as leaves the mind in doubt concerning the truth. Indeed in all theſe caſes, there is no more evidence on one ſide, than on the other; but there is (what is equivalent to) much more for either, than for the truth of a number of facts which come into one's thoughts at random. And thus in all theſe caſes, doubt as much preſuppoſes evidence, lower degrees of evidence; as belief preſuppoſes higher, and certainty higher ſtill. Any one, who will a little attend to the nature of evidence, will eaſily carry this obſervation on, and ſee, that between no evidence at all, and that degree of it which affords ground of doubt, there are as many intermediate degrees; as there are, between that degree which is the ground of doubt, and demonſtration. And though we have not faculties to diſtinguiſh theſe degrees of evidence, with any ſort of exactneſs; yet, in proportion as they are diſcerned, they ought to influence our practice. For it is as real an imperfection in the moral character, not to be influenced in practice by a lower degree of evidence when diſcerned, as it is, in the underſtanding, not to diſcern it. And as, in all ſubjects which men conſider, they diſcern the lower, as well as higher degrees of evidence, proportionably to their

* Introduction.

capacity of underſtanding: ſo, in practical ſubjects, they are influenced in practice, by the lower as well as higher degrees of it, proportionably to their fairneſs and honeſty. And as, in proportion to defects in the underſtanding, men are unapt to ſee lower degrees of evidence, are in danger of overlooking evidence when it is not glaring, and are eaſily impoſed upon in ſuch caſes: ſo, in proportion to the corruption of the heart, they ſeem capable of ſatisfying themſelves with having no regard in practice to evidence acknowledged real, if it be not overbearing. From theſe things it muſt follow, that doubting concerning religion implies ſuch a degree of evidence for it, as joined with the conſideration of its importance, unqueſtionably lays men under the obligations before mentioned, to have a dutiful regard to it in all their behaviour.

Thirdly, THE difficulties in which the evidence of religion is involved, which ſome complain of, is no more a juſt ground of complaint, than the external circumſtances of temptation, which others are placed in; or than difficulties in the practice of it, after a full conviction of its truth. Temptations render our ſtate a more improving ſtate of diſcipline*, than it would be otherwiſe: as they give occaſion for a more attentive exerciſe of the virtuous principle, which confirms and ſtrengthens it more, than an eaſier or leſs attentive exerciſe of it could. Now ſpeculative difficulties are, in this reſpect, of the very ſame nature with theſe external temptations. For the evidence of religion not appearing obvious, is, to ſome perſons, a temptation

* Part I. Chap. v.

to reject it, without any conſideration at all; and therefore requires ſuch an attentive exerciſe of the virtuous principle, ſeriouſly to conſider that evidence, as there would be no occaſion for, but for ſuch temptation. And the ſuppoſed doubtfulneſs of its evidence, after it has been in ſome ſort conſidered, affords opportunity to an unfair mind of explaining away, and deceitfully hiding from itſelf, That evidence which it might ſee; and alſo for men's encouraging themſelves in vice from hopes of impunity, though they do clearly ſee thus much at leaſt, that theſe hopes are uncertain: In like manner as the common temptation to many inſtances of folly which end in temporal infamy and ruin, is, the ground for hope of not being detected, and of eſcaping with impunity; *i. e.* the doubtfulneſs of the proof beforehand, that ſuch fooliſh behaviour will thus end in infamy and ruin. On the contrary, ſuppoſed doubtfulneſs in the evidence of religion calls for a more careful and attentive exerciſe of the virtuous principle, in fairly yielding themſelves up to the proper influence of any real evidence, though doubtful; and in practiſing conſcientiouſly all virtue, though under ſome uncertainty, whether the government in the univerſe may not poſſibly be ſuch, as that vice may eſcape with impunity. And in general, temptation, meaning by this word, the leſſer allurements, the wrong and difficulties in the diſcharge of our duty, as well as the greater ones: Temptation, I ſay, as ſuch and of every kind and degree, as it calls forth ſome virtuous efforts, additional to what would otherwiſe

have been wanting, cannot but be an additional diſcipline and improvement of virtue, as well as probation of it in the other ſenſes of that word*. So that the very ſame account is to be given, why the evidence of religion ſhould be left in ſuch a manner, as to require, in ſome, an attentive, ſollicitous, perhaps painful exerciſe of their underſtanding about it; as why others ſhould be placed in ſuch circumſtances, as that the practice of its common duties, after a full conviction of the truth of it, ſhould require attention, ſollicitude and pains: Or, why appearing doubtfulneſs ſhould be permitted to afford matter of temptation to ſome; as why external difficulties and allurements ſhould be permitted to afford matter of temptation to others. The ſame account alſo is to be given, why ſome ſhould be exerciſed with temptations of both theſe kinds; as why others ſhould be exerciſed with the latter in ſuch very high degrees, as ſome have been, particularly as the primitive Chriſtians were.

NOR does there appear any abſurdity in ſuppoſing, that the ſpeculative difficulties in which the evidence of religion is involved, may make even the principal part of ſome perſons trial. For, as the chief temptations of the generality of the world, are, the ordinary motives to injuſtice or unreſtrained pleaſure; or to live in the neglect of religion from that frame of mind, which renders many perſons almoſt without feeling as to any thing diſtant, or which is not the object of their ſenſes: So there are other perſons without this ſhallowneſs of temper, perſons of a deeper ſenſe as to what is inviſible and future;

* Part I. Chap. iv. and page 125.

who not only ſee, but have a general practical feeling, that what is to come will be preſent, and that things are not leſs real for their not being the objects of ſenſe; and who, from their natural conſtitution of body, and of temper, and from their external condition, may have ſmall temptations to behave ill, ſmall difficulty in behaving well, in the common courſe of life. Now when theſe latter perſons have a diſtinct full conviction of the truth of religion, without any poſſible doubts or difficulties, the practice of it is to them unavoidable, unleſs they would do a conſtant violence to their own minds; and religion is ſcarce any more a diſcipline to them, than it is to creatures in a ſtate of perfection. Yet theſe perſons may poſſibly ſtand in need of moral diſcipline and exerciſe in a higher degree, than they would have by ſuch an eaſy practice of religion. Or it may be requiſite, for reaſons unknown to us, that they ſhould give ſome farther manifeſtation * what is their moral character, to the creation of God, than ſuch a practice of it would be. Thus in the great variety of religious ſituations in which men are placed, what conſtitutes, what chiefly and peculiarly conſtitutes, the probation, in all ſenſes, of ſome perſons, may be the difficulties in which the evidence of religion is involved: and their principal and diſtinguiſhed trial, may be, how they will behave under and with reſpect to theſe difficulties. Circumſtances in mens ſituation in their temporal capacity, analogous in good meaſure to this reſpecting religion, are to be obſerved. We find ſome perſons

* Pag. 125.

are placed in ſuch a ſituation in the world, as that their chief difficulty with regard to conduct, is not the doing what is prudent when it is known; for this, in numberleſs caſes, is as eaſy as the contrary: but to ſome the principal exerciſe is, recollection and being upon their guard againſt deceits, the deceits ſuppoſe of thoſe about them; againſt falſe appearances of reaſon and prudence. To perſons in ſome ſituations, the principal exerciſe with reſpect to conduct, is, attention in order to inform themſelves what is proper, what is really the reaſonable and prudent part to act.

But as I have hitherto gone upon ſuppoſition, that mens diſſatisfaction with the evidence of religion is not owing to their neglects or prejudices; it muſt be added, on the other hand, in all common reaſon, and as what the truth of the caſe plainly requires ſhould be added, that ſuch diſſatisfaction poſſibly may be owing to thoſe, poſſibly may be mens own fault. For,

If there are any perſons, who never ſet themſelves heartily and in earneſt to be informed in religion: if there are any, who ſecretly wiſh it may not prove true; and are leſs attentive to evidence than to difficulties, and more to objections than to what is ſaid in anſwer to them: theſe perſons will ſcarce be thought in a likely way of ſeeing the evidence of Religion, though it were moſt certainly true, and capable of being ever ſo fully proved. If any accuſtom themſelves to conſider this ſubject uſually in the way of mirth and ſport: if they attend to

forms and repreſentations and inadequate manners of expreſſion, inſtead of the real things intended by them: (for ſigns often can be no more than inadequately expreſſive of the things ſignified:) or if they ſubſtitute human errors, in the room of divine truth: Why may not all, or any of theſe things, hinder ſome men from ſeeing that evidence, which really is ſeen by others; as a like turn of mind, with reſpect to matters of common ſpeculation and practice, does, we find by experience, hinder them from attaining that knowledge and right underſtanding, in matters of common ſpeculation and practice, which more fair and attentive minds attain to? And the effect will be the ſame, whether their neglect of ſeriouſly conſidering the evidence of religion, and their indirect behaviour with regard to it, proceed from meer careleſſneſs, or from the groſſer vices; or whether it be owing to this, that forms and figurative manners of expreſſion, as well as errors, adminiſter occaſions of ridicule, when the things intended, and the truth itſelf, would not. Men may indulge a ludicrous turn ſo far as to loſe all ſenſe of conduct and prudence in worldly affairs, and even, as it ſeems, to impair their faculty of reaſon. And in general, levity, careleſſneſs, paſſion, and prejudice, *do* hinder us from being rightly informed, with reſpect to common things: and they *may*, in like manner, and perhaps in ſome farther providential manner, with reſpect to moral and religious ſubjects: may hinder evidence from being laid before us, and from being

laid before us, and from being ſeen when it is. The Scripture * does declare, that every one *ſhall not underſtand.* And it makes no difference, by what providential conduct, this comes to paſs: Whether the evidence of Chriſtianity was, originally and with deſign, put and left ſo, as that thoſe who are deſirous of evading moral obligations, ſhould not ſee it; and that honeſt-minded perſons ſhould: Or, whether it comes to paſs by any other means.

FARTHER: The general proof of Natural Religion and of Chriſtianity, does, I think, lie level to common men; even thoſe, the greateſt part of whoſe time, from childhood to old-age, is taken up with providing, for themſelves and their families, the common conveniencies perhaps neceſſaries of life: thoſe, I mean, of this rank, who never think at all of aſking after proof or attending to it. Common men, were they as much in earneſt about religion, as about their temporal affairs, are capable of being convinced upon real evidence, that there is a God who governs the world: and they feel themſelves to be of a moral nature, and accountable creatures. And as Chriſtianity intirely falls in

* Dan. xii. 10. See alſo Iſa. xxix. 13, 14. Mat. vi. 23. and xi. 25. and xiii. 11, and 12. John iii. 19. John v. 44. 1 Cor. ii. 14. and 2 Cor. iv. 4. 2 Tim. iii. 13. and that affectionate, as well as authoritative admonition, ſo very many times inculcated, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.* Grotius ſaw ſo ſtrongly the thing intended in theſe and other paſſages of Scripture of the like ſenſe, as to ſay, that the proof given us of Chriſtianity was leſs than it might have been, for this very purpoſe: *Ut ita ſermo evangelii tanquam lapis eſſet Lydius ad quem ingenia ſanabilia explorarentur.* De Ver. R. C. L. 2. towards the end.

with this their natural ſenſe of things; ſo they are capable, not only of being perſuaded, but of being made to ſee, that there is evidence of miracles wrought in atteſtation of it, and many appearing completions of prophecy. But though this proof is real and concluſive, yet it is liable to objections, and may be run up into difficulties; which, however, perſons who are capable, not only of talking of, but of really ſeeing, are capable alſo of ſeeing through: *i. e.* not of clearing up and anſwering them, ſo as to ſatisfy their curioſity, for of ſuch knowledge we are not capable with reſpect to any one thing in nature; but capable of ſeeing that the proof is not loſt in theſe difficulties, or deſtroyed by theſe objections. But then a thorough examination into religion, with regard to theſe objections, which cannot be the buſineſs of every man, is a matter of pretty large compaſs, and, from the nature of it, requires ſome knowledge, as well as time and attention; to ſee, how the evidence comes out, upon ballancing one thing with another, and what, upon the whole, is the amount of it. Now if perſons who have picked up theſe objections from others, and take for granted they are of weight, upon the word of thoſe from whom they received them, or, by often retailing of them, come to ſee or fancy they ſee them to be of weight; will not prepare themſelves for ſuch an examination, with a competent degree of knowledge; or will not give that time and attention to the ſubject, which, from the nature of it, is neceſſary for attaining ſuch information: in this caſe, they muſt remain in doubtfulneſs, ignorance or error; in the ſame way as they

muſt, with regard to common ſciences and matters of common life, if they neglect the neceſſary means of being informed in them.

But ſtill perhaps it will be objected, that if a prince or common maſter were to ſend directions to a ſervant, he would take care, that they ſhould always bear the certain marks, who they came from, and that their ſenſe ſhould be always plain: ſo as that there ſhould be no poſſible doubt, if he could help it, concerning the authority or meaning of them. Now the proper anſwer to all this kind of objections is, that, wherever the fallacy lies, it is even certain we cannot argue thus with reſpect to Him, who is the Governor of the world: and particularly that he does not afford us ſuch information, with reſpect to our temporal affairs and intereſt, as experience abundantly ſhews. However, there is a full anſwer to this objection, from the very nature of religion. For the reaſon why a prince would give his directions in this plain manner, is, that he abſolutely deſires ſuch an external action ſhould be done, without concerning himſelf with the motive or principle upon which it is done: *i. e.* he regards only the external event, or the things being done; and not at all, properly ſpeaking, the doing of it, or the action. Whereas the whole of Morality and Religion conſiſting merely in action itſelf, there is no ſort of parallel between the caſes. But if the prince be ſuppoſed to regard only the action; *i. e.* only to deſire to exerciſe, or in any ſenſe prove, the underſtanding or loyalty of a ſervant; he would not

always give his orders in ſuch a plain manner. It may be proper to add, that the will of God, reſpecting Morality and Religion, may be conſidered, either as abſolute, or as only conditional. If it be abſolute, it can only be thus, that we ſhould act virtuouſly in ſuch given circumſtances; not that we ſhould be brought to act ſo, by his changing of our circumſtances. And if God's will be thus abſolute, then it is in our power, in the higheſt and ſtricteſt ſenſe, to do or to contradict his will; which is a moſt weighty conſideration. Or His will may be conſidered only as conditional, that if we act ſo and ſo, we ſhall be rewarded; if otherwiſe, puniſhed: of which conditional will of the Author of Nature the whole conſtitution of it affords moſt certain inſtances.

UPON the whole: that we are in a State of Religion neceſſarily implies, that we are in a State of Probation: and the Credibility of our being at all in ſuch a ſtate being admitted, there ſeems no peculiar difficulty in ſuppoſing our Probation to be, juſt as it is, in thoſe reſpects which are above objected againſt. There ſeems no pretence, from *the reaſon of the thing*, to ſay, that the trial cannot equitably be any thing, but whether perſons will act ſuitably to certain information, or ſuch as admits no room for doubt; ſo as that there can be no danger of miſcarriage, but either from their not attending to what they certainly know, or from overbearing paſſion hurrying them on to act contrary to it. For, ſince Ignorance and Doubt afford ſcope for Probation in all ſenſes, as really as intuitive Convic-

tion or Certainty; and ſince the two former are to be put to the ſame account, as difficulties in practice; Men's moral Probation may alſo be, whether they will take due care to inform themſelves by impartial conſideration, and afterwards whether they will act as the caſe requires, upon the evidence which they have, however doubtful. And this we find by experience, is frequently our probation *, in our temporal capacity. For, the information which we want with regard to our worldly intereſts, is by no means always given us of courſe, without any care of our own. And we are greatly liable to ſelf-deceit from inward ſecret prejudices, and alſo to the deceits of others. So that to be able to judge what is the prudent part, often requires much and difficult conſideration. Then after we have judged the very beſt we can, the evidence upon which we muſt act, if we will live and act at all, is perpetually doubtful to a very high degree. And the conſtitution and courſe of the world in fact is ſuch, as that want of impartial conſideration what we have to do, and venturing upon extravagant courſes becauſe it is doubtful what will be the conſequence, are often naturally, *i. e.* providentially, altogether as fatal, as miſconduct occaſioned by heedleſs inattention to what we certainly know, or diſregarding it from overbearing paſſion.

Several of the obſervations here made, may well ſeem ſtrange, perhaps unintelligible, to many good

* Pag. 47, &c.

men, but if the perſons for whoſe ſake they are made, think ſo; perſons who object as above, and throw off all regard to Religion under pretence of want of evidence; I deſire them to conſider again, whether their thinking ſo, be owing to any thing unintelligible in theſe obſervations, or to their own not having ſuch a ſenſe of religion and ſerious ſollicitude about it, as even their ſtate of ſcepticiſm does in all reaſon require? It ought to be forced upon the reflection of theſe perſons, that our nature and condition neceſſarily require us, in the daily courſe of life, to act upon evidence much lower than what is commonly called probable; to guard, not only againſt what we fully believe will, but alſo againſt what we think it ſuppoſeable may, happen; and to engage in purſuits when the probability is greatly againſt ſucceſs, if it be credible, that poſſibly we may ſucceed in them.

PART II.

CHAP. VII.

Of the particular Evidence for Chriſtianity.

THE preſumptions againſt Revelation, and objections againſt the general ſcheme of Chriſtianity, and particular things relating to it, being removed; there remains to be conſidered, what poſitive evidence we have for the truth of it: chiefly in order to ſee, What the Analogy of Nature ſuggeſts with regard to that evidence, and the objections againſt it: or to ſee what is, and is allowed to be, the plain natural rule of judgment and of action, in our temporal concerns, in caſes where we have the ſame kind of evidence, and the ſame kind of objections againſt it, that we have in the caſe before us.

Now in the Evidence of Chriſtianity, there ſeem to be ſeveral things of great weight, not reducible to the head, either of Miracles, or the Completion of Prophecy, in the common acceptation of the words. But theſe two are its direct and fundamental proofs: and thoſe other things, however conſiderable they are, yet ought never to be urged apart from its direct proofs, but always to be joined with

them. Thus the Evidence of Chriſtianity will be a long Series of things, reaching, as it ſeems, from the beginning of the world to the preſent time, of great variety and compaſs, taking in both the direct, and alſo the collateral, proofs; and making up, all of them together, one argument: the conviction ariſing from which kind of proof may be compared to what they call *the Effect* in architecture or other works of Art; a reſult from a great number of things ſo and ſo diſpoſed, and taken into one view. I ſhall therefore, *FIRST*, make ſome obſervations relating to miracles, and the appearing completions of prophecy; and conſider what analogy ſuggeſts, in anſwer to the objections brought againſt this evidence. And, *SECONDLY*, I ſhall endeavour to give ſome account of the general argument now mentioned, conſiſting both of the direct and collateral evidence, conſidered as making up one argument: this being the kind of proof upon which we determine moſt queſtions of difficulty, concerning common facts, alledged to have happened or ſeeming likely to happen; eſpecially queſtions relating to conduct.

FIRST I ſhall make ſome obſervations upon the direct proof of Chriſtianity from miracles and Prophecy, and upon the objections alledged againſt it.

I. Now the following obſervations, relating to the hiſtorical evidence of Miracles wrought in atteſtation of Chriſtianity, appear to be of great weight.

1. The Old Teſtament affords us the ſame hiſto-

rical evidence of the miracles of *Moſes* and of the prophets, as of the common civil hiſtory of *Moſes* and of the kings of *Iſrael*; or, as of the affairs of the Jewiſh nation. And the *goſpels* and *the acts* afford us the ſame hiſtorical evidence of the miracles of Chriſt and the apoſtles, as of the common matters related in them. This indeed could not have been affirmed by any reaſonable man, if the authors of theſe books, like many other hiſtorians, had appeared to make an entertaining manner of writing their aim; though they had interſperſed miracles in their works, at proper diſtances and upon proper occaſions. Theſe might have animated a dull relation, amuſed the reader and engaged his attention. And the ſame account would naturally have been given of them, as, of the ſpeeches and deſcriptions of ſuch authors: the ſame account, in a manner, as is to be given, why the poets make uſe of wonders and prodigies. But the facts, both miraculous and natural, in Scripture, are related in plain unadorned naratives: and both of them appear, in all reſpects, to ſtand upon the ſame foot of hiſtorical evidence. Farther, ſome parts of Scripture, containing an account of miracles fully ſufficient to prove the truth of Chriſtianity, are quoted as genuine, from the age in which they are ſaid to be written, down to the preſent: and no other parts of them, material in the preſent queſtion, are omitted to be quoted in ſuch manner, as to afford any ſort of proof of their not being genuine. And, as common hiſtory, when called in queſtion in any inſtance, may often be greatly confirmed by contemporary or ſubſequent events more known and

acknowledged; and as the common Scripture-hiſtory; like many others, is thus confirmed: ſo likewiſe is the miraculous hiſtory of it, not only in particular inſtances, but in general. For, the eſtabliſhment of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian religions, which were events contemporary with the miracles related to be wrought in atteſtation of both, or ſubſequent to them, theſe events are juſt what we ſhould have expected, upon ſuppoſition ſuch miracles were really wrought to atteſt the truth of thoſe religions. Theſe miracles are a ſatisfactory account of thoſe events: of which, no other ſatisfactory account can be given; nor any account at all, but what is imaginary merely and invented. It is to be added, that the moſt obvious, the moſt eaſy and direct account of this hiſtory, how it came to be written and to be received in the world, as a true hiſtory; is, that it really is ſo: nor can any other account of it be eaſy and direct. Now, though an account, not at all obvious, but very far-fetched and indirect, may indeed be, and often is, the true account of a matter; yet it cannot be admitted on the authority of its being aſſerted. Mere gueſs, ſuppoſition, and poſſibility, when oppoſed to hiſtorical evidence, prove nothing, but that hiſtorical evidence is not demonſtrative.

Now the juſt conſequence from all this, I think, is, that the Scripture-hiſtory in general is to be admitted as an authentic genuine hiſtory, till ſomewhat poſitive be alledged ſufficient to invalidate it. But no man will deny the conſequence to be, that it cannot be rejected, or thrown by as of no au-

thority, till it can be proved to be of none; even though the evidence now mentioned for its authority, were doubtful. This evidence may be confronted, by hiſtorical evidence on the other ſide, if there be any: or general incredibility in the things related, or inconſiſtence in the general turn of the hiſtory, would prove it to be of no authority. But ſince, upon the face of the matter, upon a firſt and general view, the appearance is, that it is an authentic hiſtory; it cannot be determined to be fictitious without ſome proof, that it is ſo. And the following obſervations, in ſupport of theſe and coincident with them, will greatly confirm the hiſtorical evidence for the truth of Chriſtianity.

2. THE epiſtles of St. *Paul*, from the nature of epiſtolary writing, and moreover from ſeveral of them being written, not to particular perſons, but to churches; carry in them evidences of their being genuine, beyond what can be in a mere hiſtorical narrative, left to the world at large. This evidence, joined with that which they have in common with the reſt of the New Teſtament, ſeems not to leave ſo much as any particular pretence for denying their genuineneſs, conſidered as an ordinary matter of fact, or of criticiſm: I ſay, *particular* pretence, for *denying* it; becauſe any ſingle fact, of ſuch a kind and ſuch antiquity, may have *general doubts* raiſed concerning it, from the very nature of human affairs and human teſtimony. There is alſo to be mentioned, a diſtinct and particular evidence of the genuineneſs of the epiſtle chiefly referred to here, the firſt to the Corinthians; from

the manner in which it is quoted by *Clemens Romanus*, in an epiſtle of his own to that church *. Now theſe epiſtles afford a proof of Chriſtianity, detached from all others, which is, I think, a thing of weight; and alſo a proof of a nature and kind peculiar to itſelf. For,

8 In them the author declares, that he received the Goſpel in general, and the inſtitution of the communion in particular, not from the reſt of the apoſtles, or jointly together with them, but alone, from Chriſt himſelf; whom he declares likewiſe, conformably to the hiſtory of the *Acts*, that he ſaw after his aſcenſion †. So that the teſtimony of St. *Paul* is to be conſidered, as detached from that of the reſt of the apoſtles.

9 And he declares farther, that he was endued with a power of working miracles, as what was publickly known to thoſe very people, ſpeaks of frequent and great variety of miraculous gifts as then ſubſiſting in thoſe very churches, to which he was writing; which he was reproving for ſeveral irregularities; and where he had perſonal oppoſers: He mentions theſe gifts incidentally, in the moſt eaſy manner and without effort; by way of reproof to thoſe who had them, for their indecent uſe of them; and by way of depreciating them, in compariſon of moral virtues; in ſhort he ſpeaks to theſe churches, of theſe miraculous powers, in the manner, any one would ſpeak to another of a thing, which was as familiar and as much known in common to them

* Clem. Rom. Ep. I. c. 47.
† Gal. i. 1 Cor. xi. 23, &c. 1 Cor. xv. 8.

both, as any thing in the world *. And this, as hath been obſerved by ſeveral perſons, is ſurely a very conſiderable thing.

2. IT is an acknowledged hiſtorical fact, that Chriſtianity offered itſelf to the world, and demanded to be received, upon the allegation, *i. e.* as unbelievers would ſpeak, upon the pretence, of miracles, publickly wrought to atteſt the truth of it, in ſuch an age: and that it was actually received by great numbers in that very age, and upon the profeſſed belief of the reality of theſe miracles. And Chriſtianity, including the diſpenſation of the Old Teſtament, ſeems diſtinguiſhed by This from all other religions. I mean, that this does not appear to be the caſe with regard to any other: for ſurely it will not be ſuppoſed to lie upon any perſon, to prove by poſitive hiſtorical evidence, that it was not. It does in no ſort appear, that Mahometaniſm was firſt received in the world upon the foot of ſuppoſed miracles †, *i. e.* public ones: for, as Revelation is itſelf miraculous, all pretence to it muſt neceſſarily imply ſome pretence of miracles. And it is a known fact, that it was immediately, at the very firſt, propagated by other means. And as particular inſtitutions, whether in Paganiſm or Popery, ſaid to be confirmed by miracles after thoſe inſtitutions had obtained, are not to the purpoſe: So, were there what might be called hiſtorical proof, that any of them were introduced by a ſuppoſed Divine com-

* Rom. xv. 19. 1 Cor. xii. 8, 9, 10—28, &c. and ch. xiii. 1, 2, 8. and the whole xivth ch. 2 Cor. xii. 12. 13. Gal. iii. 2, 5.

† See the Koran, ch. xiii, and ch. xvii.

mand, believed to be atteſted by miracles; theſe would not be in any ways parallel. For ſingle things of this ſort are eaſy to be accounted for, after parties are formed, and have power in their hands; and the leaders of them are in veneration with the multitude; and political intereſts are blended with religious claims, and religious diſtinctions. But before any thing of this kind, for a few perſons, and thoſe of the loweſt rank, all at once, to bring over ſuch great numbers to a new religion, and get it to be received upon the particular evidence of miracles; this is quite another thing. And I think it will be allowed by any fair adverſary, that the fact now mentioned, taking in all the circumſtances of it, is peculiar to the Chriſtian Religion. However, the fact itſelf is allowed, that Chriſtianity obtained, *i. e.* was profeſſed to be received in the world, upon the belief of miracles, immediately in the age in which it is ſaid thoſe miracles were wrought: or that this is what its firſt converts would have alledged, as the reaſon for their embracing it. Now certainly it is not to be ſuppoſed, that ſuch numbers of men, in the moſt diſtant parts of the world, ſhould forſake the Religion of their country, in which they had been educated; ſeparate themſelves from their friends, particularly in their feſtival ſhows and ſolemnities, to which the common people are ſo greatly addicted, and which were of a nature to engage them much more, than any thing of that ſort amongſt us; and embrace a religion, which could not but expoſe them to many inconveniencies, and indeed muſt have been a giving up the world in a

great degree, even from the very firſt, and before the empire engaged in form againſt them: it cannot be ſuppoſed, that ſuch numbers ſhould make ſo great, and, to ſay the leaſt, ſo inconvenient a change in their whole inſtitution of life, unleſs they were really convinced of the truth of thoſe miracles, upon the knowledge or belief of which, they profeſſed to make it. And it will, I ſuppoſe, readily be acknowledged, that the generality of the firſt converts to Chriſtianity, muſt have believed them: that as by becoming Chriſtians, they declared to the world, they were ſatisfied of the truth of thoſe miracles; ſo this declaration was to be credited. And this their teſtimony is the ſame kind of evidence for thoſe miracles, as if they had put it in writing, and theſe writings had come down to us. And it is real evidence, becauſe it is of facts, which they had capacity and full opportunity to inform themſelves of. It is alſo diſtinct from the direct or expreſs hiſtorical evidence, though it is of the ſame kind: and it would be allowed to be diſtinct in all caſes. For were a fact expreſsly related by one or more antient hiſtorians, and diſputed in after ages: that this fact is acknowledged to have been believed, by great numbers of the age in which the hiſtorian ſays it was done, would be allowed an additional proof of ſuch fact, quite diſtinct from the expreſs teſtimony of the hiſtorian. The credulity of mankind is acknowledged: and the ſuſpicions of mankind ought to be acknowledged too; and their backwardneſs even to believe, and greater ſtill to practiſe, what makes againſt their intereſt. And it

muſt particularly be remembred, that education, and prejudice, and authority, were againſt Chriſtianity, in the age I am ſpeaking of. So that the immediate converſion of ſuch numbers, is a real preſumption of ſomewhat more than human in this matter: I ſay preſumption, for it is not alledged as a proof alone and by itſelf. Nor need any one of the things mentioned in this chapter, be conſidered as a proof by itſelf: and yet all of them together may be one of the ſtrongeſt *

11 UPON the whole: As there is large hiſtorical evidence, both direct and circumſtantial, of miracles wrought in atteſtation of Chriſtianity, collected by thoſe who have writ upon the ſubject; it lies upon unbelievers to ſhew, why this evidence is not to be credited. This way of ſpeaking is, I think, juſt; and what perſons who write in defence of religion, naturally fall into. Yet, in a matter of ſuch unſpeakable importance, the proper queſtion is, not whom it lies upon, according to the rules of argument, to maintain or confute objections: but, whether there really are any, againſt this evidence, ſufficient, in reaſon, to deſtroy the credit of it. However, unbelievers ſeem to take upon them the part of ſhewing that there are.

12 THEY alledge, that numberleſs enthuſiaſtic people, in different ages and countries, expoſe themſelves to the ſame difficulties which the primitive Chriſtians did; and are ready to give up their lives, for the moſt idle follies imaginable. But it is not

* See the laſt paragraph except two of this chapter.

very clear, to what purpoſe this objection is brought. For every one, ſurely, in every caſe, muſt diſtinguiſh between opinions and facts. And though teſtimony is no proof of enthuſiaſtic opinions, or of any opinions at all; yet it is allowed, in all other caſes, to be a proof of facts. And a perſon's laying down his life in atteſtation of facts or of opinions, is the ſtrongeſt proof of his believing them. And if the apoſtles and their cotemporaries did believe the facts, in atteſtation of which they expoſed themſelves to ſufferings and death; this their belief, or rather knowledge, muſt be a proof of thoſe facts: for they were ſuch as came under the obſervation of their ſenſes. And though it is not of equal weight, yet it is of weight, that the martyrs of the next age, notwithſtanding they were not eye-witneſſes of thoſe facts, as were the apoſtles and their cotemporaries, had, however, full opportunity to inform themſelves, whether they were true or not, and gave equal proof of their believing them to be true.

13 But enthuſiaſm, it is ſaid, greatly weakens the evidence of teſtimony even for facts, in matters relating to Religion: Some ſeem to think, it totally and abſolutely deſtroys the evidence of teſtimony upon this ſubject. And indeed the powers of enthuſiaſm, and of diſeaſes too which operate in a like manner, are very wonderful, in particular inſtances. But if great numbers of men, not appearing in any peculiar degree weak, nor under any peculiar ſuſpicion of negligence, affirm that they ſaw and

heard ſuch things plainly with their eyes and their ears, and are admitted to be in earneſt; ſuch teſtimony is evidence of the ſtrongeſt kind we can have, for any matter of fact. Yet poſſibly it may be overcome, ſtrong as it is, by incredibility in the things thus atteſted, or by contrary teſtimony. And in an inſtance where one thought it was ſo overcome, it might be juſt to conſider, how far ſuch evidence could be accounted for, by enthuſiaſm: for it ſeems as if no other imaginable account were to be given of it. But till ſuch incredibility be ſhewn, or contrary teſtimony produced, it cannot ſurely be expected, that ſo far-fetched, ſo indirect and wonderful an account of ſuch teſtimony, as that of enthuſiaſm muſt be; an account ſo ſtrange, that the generality of mankind can ſcarce be made to underſtand what is meant by it: it cannot, I ſay, be expected; that ſuch account will be admitted of ſuch evidence; when there is this direct, eaſy and obvious account of it, that people really ſaw and heard a thing not incredible, which they affirm ſincerely and with full aſſurance, they did ſee and hear. Granting then that enthuſiaſm is not (ſtrictly ſpeaking) an abſurd, but a poſſible account of ſuch teſtimony: it is manifeſt that the very mention of it, goes upon the previous ſuppoſition, that the things ſo atteſted are incredible; and therefore need not be conſidered, till they are ſhewn to be ſo. Much leſs need it be conſidered, after the contrary has been proved. And I think it has been proved, to full ſatisfaction, that there is no incredibility in a revelation, in general; or in ſuch an one as the Chriſtian, in particular. However; as

Religion is ſuppoſed peculiarly liable to enthuſiaſm, it may juſt be obſerved, that prejudices almoſt without number and without name, romance, affectation, humour, a deſire to engage attention or to ſurprize, the party-ſpirit, cuſtom, little competitions, unaccountable likings and diſlikings, theſe influence men ſtrongly in common matters. And as theſe prejudices are often ſcarce known or reflected upon by the perſons themſelves who are influenced by them, they are to be conſidered as influences of a like kind to enthuſiaſm, yet human teſtimony in common matters is naturally and juſtly believed notwithſtanding.

IT is intimated farther, in a more refined way of obſervation, that though it ſhould be proved, that the Apoſtles and firſt Chriſtians could not, in ſome reſpects, be deceived themſelves, and, in other reſpects, cannot be thought to have intended to impoſe upon the world; yet it will not follow, that their general teſtimony is to be believed, though truly handed down to us: becauſe they might ſtill in part, *i. e.* in other reſpects, be deceived themſelves, and in part alſo deſignedly impoſe upon others; which, it is added, is a thing very credible, from that mixture of real enthuſiaſm, and real knavery, to be met with in the ſame characters. And, I muſt confeſs, I think the matter of fact contained in this obſervation upon mankind, is not to be denied; and that ſomewhat very much a-kin to it, is often ſuppoſed in Scripture as a very common caſe, and moſt ſeverely reproved. But it were to have been expected, that perſons capable of applying this

obſervation as applied in the objection, might alſo frequently have met with the like mixt character, in inſtances where Religion was quite out of the caſe. The thing plainly is, that mankind are naturally endued with reaſon, or a capacity of diſtinguiſhing between truth and falſhood; and as naturally they are endued with veracity, or a regard to truth in what they ſay: but from many occaſions, they are liable to be prejudiced and biaſſed and deceived themſelves, and capable of intending to deceive others, in every different degree: inſomuch that, as we are all liable to be deceived by prejudice, ſo likewiſe it ſeems to be not an uncommon thing, for perſons, who, from their regard to truth, would not invent a lie entirely without any foundation at all, to propagate it with heightning circumſtances, after it is once invented and ſet a-going. And others, though they would not *propagate* a lie, yet, which is a lower degree of falſhood, will let it paſs without contradiction. But notwithſtanding all this, human teſtimony remains ſtill a natural ground of aſſent; and this aſſent, a natural principle of action.

IT is objected farther, that however it has happened, the fact is, that mankind have, in different ages, been ſtrangely deluded with pretences to miracles and wonders. But it is by no means to be admitted, that they have been oftener, or are at all more liable to be deceived by theſe pretences, than by others.

IT is added, that there is a very conſiderable de-

gree of hiſtorical evidence for miracles, which are, on all hands, acknowledged to be fabulous. But ſuppoſe there were even *the like* hiſtorical evidence for theſe, to what there is for thoſe alledged in proof of Chriſtianity, which yet is in no wiſe allowed, but ſuppoſe this; the conſequence would not be, that the evidence of the latter is not to be admitted. Nor is there a man in the world who, in common caſes, would conclude thus. For, what would ſuch a concluſion really amount to but this, that evidence confuted by contrary evidence, or any way over-balanced, deſtroys the credibility of other evidence, neither confuted, nor over-balanced? To argue, that becauſe there is, if there were, like evidence for teſtimony, for miracles acknowledged falſe, as for thoſe in atteſtation of Chriſtianity, therefore the evidence in the latter caſe is not to be credited; this is the ſame as to argue, that if two men of equally good reputation, had given evidence in different caſes no way connected, and one of them had been convicted of perjury, this confuted the teſtimony of the other.

UPON the whole then, the general obſervation that human creatures are ſo liable to be deceived, from enthuſiaſm in religion, and principles equivalent to enthuſiaſm in common matters, and in both from negligence; and that they are ſo capable of diſhoneſtly endeavouring to deceive others; this does indeed weaken the evidence of teſtimony in all caſes, but does not deſtroy it in any. And theſe things will appear, to different men, to weaken the evidence of teſtimony, in different degrees: in de-

grees proportionable to the obſervations they have made, or the notions they have any way taken up, concerning the weakneſs and negligence and diſhoneſty of mankind; or concerning the powers of enthuſiaſm, and prejudices equivalent to it. But it ſeems to me, that people do not know what they ſay, who affirm theſe things to deſtroy the evidence from teſtimony, which we have of the truth of Chriſtianity. Nothing can deſtroy the evidence of teſtimony in any caſe, but a proof or probability, that perſons are not competent judges of the facts to which they give teſtimony; or that they are actually under ſome indirect influence in giving it, in ſuch particular caſe. Till this be made out, the *natural* laws of human actions require, that teſtimony be admitted. It can never be ſufficient to overthrow direct hiſtorical evidence, indolently to ſay, that there are ſo many principles, from whence men are liable to be deceived themſelves and diſpoſed to deceive others, eſpecially in matters of religion, that one knows not what to believe. And it is ſurprizing perſons can help reflecting, that this very manner of ſpeaking, ſuppoſes they are not ſatisfied that there is nothing in the evidence, of which they ſpeak thus; or that they can avoid obſerving, if they do make this reflection, that it is, on ſuch a ſubject, a very material one *.

And over-againſt all theſe objections, is to be ſet, the Importance of Chriſtianity, as what muſt have engaged the attention of its firſt converts, ſo as to

* See the foregoing chapter.

have rendered them less liable to be deceived from carelessness, than they would in common matters; and likewise the strong obligations to veracity, which their Religion laid them under: So that the first and most obvious presumption is, that they could not be deceived themselves, nor would deceive others. And this presumption in this degree, is peculiar to the testimony we have been considering.

IN argument, assertions are nothing in themselves, and have an air of positiveness, which sometimes is not very easy: yet they are necessary, and necessary to be repeated; in order to connect a discourse, and distinctly to lay before the view of the reader, what is proposed to be proved, and what is left as proved. Now the conclusion from the foregoing observations is, I think, beyond all doubt, this: that unbelievers must be forced to admit the external evidence for Christianity, *i. e.* the proof of miracles wrought to attest it, to be of real weight and very considerable; though they cannot allow it to be sufficient, to convince them of the reality of those miracles. And as they must, in all reason, admit this; so it seems to me, that upon consideration they would, in fact, admit it: those of them, I mean, who know any thing at all of the matter: In like manner as persons, in many cases, own, they see strong evidence from testimony, for the truth of things, which yet they cannot be convinced are true: cases suppose, where there is contrary testimony: or things which they think, whether with or without reason, to be incredible. But there is no testimony contrary to that which we have been considering:

and it has been fully proved, that there is no incredibility, in Chriſtianity in general, or in any part of it.

II. As to the evidence for Chriſtianity from Prophecy, I ſhall only make ſome few general obſervations, which are ſuggeſted by the Analogy of Nature; *i. e.* by the acknowledged natural rules of judging in common matters, concerning evidence of a like kind to this from Prophecy.

1. THE obſcurity or unintelligibleneſs of one part of a prophecy, does not, in any degree, invalidate the proof of foreſight, ariſing from the appearing completion of thoſe other parts which are underſtood. For the caſe is evidently the ſame, as if thoſe parts, which are not underſtood, were loſt, or not written at all, or written in an unknown tongue. Whether this obſervation be commonly attended to or not, it is ſo evident, that one can ſcarce bring oneſelf to ſet down an inſtance in common matters, to exemplify it. However, ſuppoſe a writing, partly in cypher, and partly in plain words at length; and that in the part one underſtood, there appeared mention of ſeveral known facts: It would never come into any man's thoughts to imagine, that if he underſtood, the whole, perhaps he might find, that thoſe facts were not in reality known by the writer. Indeed, both in this example and the thing intended to be exemplified by it, our not underſtanding the whole (the whole ſuppoſe of a ſentence or a paragraph) might ſometimes occaſion a doubt, whether one underſtood the

literal meaning of ſuch a part: But this comes under another conſideration.

FOR the ſame reaſon, though a man ſhould be incapable, for want of learning, or opportunities of inquiry, or from not having turned his ſtudies this way, even ſo much as to judge, whether particular prophecies have been throughout compleatly fulfilled; yet he may ſee, in general, that they have been fulfilled to ſuch a degree, as, upon very good ground, to be convinced of foreſight more than human in ſuch prophecies, and of ſuch events being intended by them. For the ſame reaſon alſo, though, by means of the deficiencies in civil hiſtory, and the different accounts of hiſtorians, the moſt learned ſhould not be able to make out to ſatisfaction, that ſuch parts of the prophetic hiſtory have been minutely and throughout fulfilled; yet a very ſtrong proof of foreſight may ariſe, from that general completion of them, which is made out: As much proof of foreſight, perhaps, as the giver of prophecy intended ſhould ever be afforded by ſuch parts of prophecy.

2. A long ſeries of prophecy being applicable to ſuch and ſuch events, is itſelf a proof, that it was intended of them: as the rules, by which we naturally judge and determine, in common caſes parallel to this, will ſhew. This obſervation I make in anſwer to the common objection againſt the application of the prophecies, that conſidering each of them diſtinctly by itſelf, it does not at all appear, that they were intended of thoſe particular events to

which they were applied by Chriſtians; and therefore it is to be ſuppoſed, that, if they meant any thing, they were intended of other events unknown to us, and not of theſe at all.

Now there are two kinds of writing, which bear a great reſemblance to prophecy, with reſpect to the matter before us: The mythological, and the ſatirical where the ſatire is, to a certain degree, concealed. And a man might be aſſured, that he underſtood what an author intended by a fable or parable, related without any application or moral, merely from ſeeing it to be eaſily capable of ſuch application, and that ſuch a moral might naturally be deduced from it. And he might be fully aſſured, that ſuch perſons and events were intended in a ſatirical writing, merely from its being applicable to them. And, agreeably to the laſt obſervation, he might be in a good meaſure ſatisfied of it, though he were not enough informed in affairs, or in the ſtory of ſuch perſons, to underſtand half the ſatire. For his ſatisfaction, that he underſtood the meaning, the intended meaning, of theſe writings, would be greater or leſs, in proportion as he ſaw the general turn of them to be capable of ſuch application: And in proportion to the number of particular things capable of it. And thus, if a long ſeries of prophecy is applicable to the preſent ſtate of the church, and to the political ſituations of the kingdoms of the world, ſome thouſand years after theſe prophecies were delivered, and a long ſeries of prophecies delivered before the coming of Chriſt is applicable to him; theſe things are in themſelves a proof, that the prophetic hiſtory

was intended of him, and of thoſe events: in proportion as the general turn of it is capable of ſuch application, and to the number and variety of particular prophecies capable of it. And, though in all juſt way of conſideration, the appearing completion of prophecies, is to be allowed to be thus explanatory of, and to determine their meaning; yet it is to be remembred farther, that the antient Jews applied the prophecies to a Meſſiah before his coming, in much the ſame manner as Chriſtians do now: And that the primitive Chriſtians interpreted the prophecies reſpecting the ſtate of the church and of the world in the laſt ages, in the ſenſe, which the event ſeems to confirm and verify. And from theſe things, it may be made appear:

3. THAT the ſhewing even to a high probability, if that could be, that the prophets thought of ſome other events, in ſuch and ſuch predictions, and not thoſe at all, which Chriſtians alledge to be completions of thoſe predictions; or that ſuch and ſuch prophecies are capable of being applied to other events than thoſe, to which Chriſtians apply them——— that this would not confute or deſtroy the force of the argument from Prophecy, even with regard to thoſe very inſtances. For, obſerve how this matter really is. If one knew ſuch a perſon to be the ſole author of ſuch a book, and was certainly aſſured, or ſatisfied to any degree, that one knew the whole of what he intended in it; one ſhould be aſſured or ſatisfied to ſuch degree, that one knew the whole meaning of that book: for the meaning of a book,

is nothing but the meaning of the author. But if one knew a perſon to have compiled a book out of memoirs, which he received from another, of vaſtly ſuperior knowledge in the ſubject of it, eſpecially if it were a book full of great intricacies and difficulties; it would in no wiſe follow, that one knew the whole meaning of the book, from knowing the whole meaning of the compiler: for the original memoirs, *i. e.* the author of them, might have, and there would be no degree of preſumption, in many caſes, againſt ſuppoſing him to have, ſome farther meaning, than the compiler ſaw. To ſay then, that the Scriptures and the things contained in them can have no other or farther meaning, than thoſe perſons thought or had, who firſt recited or wrote them; is evidently ſaying, that thoſe perſons were the original, proper, and ſole authors of thoſe books, *i. e.* that they are not inſpired: which is abſurd, whilſt the authority of theſe books is under examination; *i. e.* till you have determined they are of no Divine authority at all. Till this be determined, it muſt in all reaſon be ſuppoſed, not indeed that they have, for this is taking for granted that they are inſpired, but that they may have, ſome farther meaning than what the compilers ſaw or underſtood. And upon this ſuppoſition, it is ſuppoſeable alſo, that this farther meaning may be fulfilled. Now events correſponding to prophecies, interpreted in a different meaning from that, in which the prophets are ſuppoſed to have underſtood them; this affords, in a manner, the ſame proof, that this different ſenſe was originally intended, as

it would have afforded, if the prophets had not underſtood their predictions in the ſenſe it is ſuppoſed they did: becauſe there is no preſumption of their ſenſe of them, being the whole ſenſe of them. And it has been already ſhewn, that the apparent completions of prophecy, muſt be allowed to be explanatory of its meaning. So that the queſtion is, whether a ſeries of prophecy has been fulfilled, in a natural or proper, *i. e.* in any real, ſenſe of the words of it. For ſuch completion is equally a proof of foreſight more than human, whether the prophets are, or are not, ſuppoſed, to have underſtood it in a different ſenſe. I ſay, ſuppoſed: for, though I think it clear, that the prophets did not underſtand the full meaning of their predictions; it is another queſtion, how far they thought they did, and in what ſenſe they underſtood them.

HENCE may be ſeen, to how little purpoſe thoſe perſons buſy themſelves, who endeavour to prove, that the prophetic hiſtory is applicable to events, of the age in which it was written, or of ages before it. Indeed to have proved this before there was any appearance of a farther completion of it, might have anſwered ſome purpoſe; for it might have prevented the expectation of any ſuch farther completion. Thus could *Porphyry* have ſhewn, that ſome principal parts of the book of *Daniel*, for inſtance, the ſeventh verſe of the ſeventh chapter, which the Chriſtians interpreted of the latter ages, was applicable to events, which happened before or about the age of *Antiochus Epiphanes*; this might have pre-

vented them from expecting any farther completion of it. And, unleſs there was then, as I think there muſt have been, external evidence concerning that book, more than is come down to us; ſuch a diſcovery might have been a ſtumbling-block in the way of Chriſtianity itſelf: conſidering the authority our Saviour has given to the book of *Daniel*, and how much the general ſcheme of Chriſtianity preſuppoſes the truth of it. But even this diſcovery, had there been any ſuch *, would be of very little weight with reaſonable men now; if this paſſage, thus applicable to events before the age of *Porphyry*, appears to be applicable alſo to events, which ſucceeded the diſſolution of the Roman Empire. I mention this, not at all as intending to inſinuate, that the diviſion of this empire into ten parts, for it plainly was divided into about that number, were, alone and by itſelf, of any moment in verifying the prophetic hiſtory: but only as an example of the thing I am ſpeaking of. And thus upon the whole, the matter of enquiry evidently muſt be, as above put, whether the prophecies are applicable, to Chriſt, and to the preſent ſtate of the world and of the church; applicable in ſuch a degree, as to imply foreſight:

* It appears, that Porphyry did nothing worth mentioning in this way. For Jerom on the place ſays: *Duas poſteriores beſtias—in uno Macedonum regno ponit.* And as to the ten kings: *Decem reges enumerat, qui fuerunt ſaeviſſimi: ipſoſque reges non unius ponit regni, verbi gratia, Macedoniae, Syriae, Aſiae, et Aegypti; ſed de diverſis regnis unum efficit regum ordinem.* And in this way of interpretation, any thing may be made of any thing.

Not whether they are capable of any other application; though I know no pretence for ſaying, the general turn of them is capable of any other.

27 THESE obſervations are, I think, juſt; and the evidence referred to in them, real: though there may be people who will not accept of ſuch imperfect information from Scripture. Some too have not integrity and regard enough to truth, to attend to evidence, which keeps the mind in doubt, perhaps perplexity, and which is much of a different ſort from what they expected. And it plainly requires a degree of modeſty and fairneſs, beyond what every one has, for a man to ſay, not to the world, but to himſelf, that there is a real appearance of ſomewhat of great weight in this matter, though he is not able thoroughly to ſatisfy himſelf about it; but it ſhall have its influence upon him, in proportion to its appearing reality and weight. It is much more eaſy, and more falls in with the negligence, preſumption and willfulneſs of the generality, to determine at once, with a deciſive air, There is nothing in it. The prejudices ariſing from that abſolute contempt and ſcorn, with which this evidence is treated in the world, I do not mention. For what indeed can be ſaid to perſons, who are weak enough in their underſtandings, to think this any preſumption againſt it; or, if they do not, are yet weak enough in their temper to be influenced, by ſuch prejudices, upon ſuch a ſubject.

28 I ſhall now, *SECONDLY*, endeavour to give ſome account of the general argument for the truth of Chriſtianity, conſiſting both of the direct and

circumſtantial evidence, conſidered as making up one argument. Indeed to ſtate and examine this argument fully, would be a work much beyond the compaſs of this whole treatiſe: nor is ſo much as a proper abridgment of it to be expected here. Yet the preſent ſubject requires to have ſome brief account of it given. For it is the kind of evidence, upon which moſt queſtions of difficulty, in common practice, are determined: evidence ariſing from various coincidences, which ſupport and confirm each other, and in this manner prove, with more or leſs certainty, the point under conſideration. And I chuſe to do it alſo: firſt, becauſe it ſeems to be of the greateſt importance, and not duly attended to by every one, that the proof of Revelation is, not ſome direct and expreſs things only, but a great variety of circumſtantial things alſo; and that though each of theſe direct and circumſtantial things, is indeed to be conſidered ſeparately, yet they are afterwards to be joined together; for that the proper force of the evidence conſiſts in the reſult of thoſe ſeveral things, conſidered in their reſpects to each other, and united into one view: And in the next place, becauſe it ſeems to me, that the matters of fact here ſet down, which are acknowledged by unbelievers, muſt be acknowledged by them alſo to contain together a degree of evidence of great weight, if they could be brought to lay theſe ſeveral things before themſelves diſtinctly, and then with attention conſider them together; inſtead of that curſory thought of them, to which we are familiariſed. For being familiariſed to the curſory thought of things, as really hinders the weight of them from

being ſeen, as from having its due influence upon practice.

THE thing aſſerted, and the truth of which is to be enquired into, is this: that over and above our reaſon and affections, which God has given us for the information of our judgment and the conduct of our lives, he has alſo, by external Revelation, given us an account of himſelf, and his moral government over the world, implying a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; *i. e.* hath revealed the Syſtem of natural Religion: for natural Religion may be externally * revealed by God, as the ignorant may be taught it by mankind, their fellow-creatures——that God, I ſay, has given us the evidence of Revelation, as well as the evidence of Reaſon, to aſcertain this moral Syſtem; together with an account of a particular diſpenſation of providence, which Reaſon could no way have diſcovered, and a particular inſtitution of Religion founded on it, for the recovery of mankind out of their preſent wretched condition, and raiſing them to the perfection and final happineſs of their nature.

THIS Revelation, whether real or ſuppoſed, may be conſidered as wholly hiſtorical. For prophecy is nothing but the hiſtory of events before they come to paſs: Doctrines alſo are matters of fact: and precepts come under the ſame notion. And the general deſign of Scripture, which contains in it this Revelation, thus conſidered as hiſtorical, may be ſaid to be, to give us an account of the world, in

* Pag. 174, &c.

this one ſingle view, as God's world: by which it appears eſſentially diſtinguiſhed from all other books, ſo far as I have found, except ſuch as are copied from it. It begins with an account of God's creation of the world, in order to aſcertain, and diſtinguiſh from all others, who is the Object of our worſhip, by what He has done: in order to aſcertain, who He is, concerning whoſe providence, commands, promiſes and threatnings, this ſacred book, all along, treats; the Maker and Proprietor of the world, He whoſe creatures we are, the God of Nature: in order likewiſe to diſtinguiſh him from the idols of the nations, which are either imaginary beings, *i. e.* no beings at all; or elſe part of that creation, the hiſtorical relation of which is here given. And St. *John*, not improbably, with an eye to this Moſaic account of the creation, begins his goſpel with an account of our Saviour's praeexiſtence, and that *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made* *: agreeably to the doctrine of St. *Paul*, that *God created all things by Jeſus Chriſt* †. This being premiſed, the Scripture, taken together, ſeems to profeſs to contain a kind of an abridgment of the hiſtory of the world, in the view juſt now mentioned: that is, a general account of the condition of Religion and its profeſſors, during the continuance of that apoſtacy from God, and ſtate of wickedneſs, which it every where ſuppoſes the world to lie in. And this account of the ſtate of Religion, carries with it ſome brief account of the political ſtate of

* John i. 3. † Eph. iii. 9.

things, as Religion is affected by it. Revelation indeed conſiders the common affairs of this world, and what is going on in it, as a mere ſcene of diſtraction; and cannot be ſuppoſed to concern itſelf with foretelling, at what time, *Rome* or *Babylon* or *Greece*, or any particular place, ſhould be the moſt conſpicuous ſeat of that tyranny and diſſoluteneſs, which all places equally aſpire to be; cannot, I ſay, be ſuppoſed to give any account of this wild ſcene for its own ſake. But it ſeems to contain ſome very general account of the chief governments of the world, as the general ſtate of Religion, has been, is, or ſhall be, affected by them, from the firſt tranſgreſſion, and during the whole interval of the world's continuing in its preſent ſtate, to a certain future period, ſpoken of both in the Old and New Teſtament, very diſtinctly, and in great variety of expreſſions: *The times of the reſtitution of all things* *: When *the myſtery of God ſhall be finiſhed, as he hath declared to his ſervants the prophets* †: When *the God of heaven ſhall ſet up a kingdom, which ſhall never be deſtroyed: and the kingdom ſhall not be left to other people* ‡, as it is repreſented to be during this apoſtacy, *but judgment ſhall be given to the ſaints* §, *and they ſhall reign* **: *And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatneſs of the kingdom under the whole heaven, ſhall be given to the people of the ſaints of the moſt High* ††.

31 UPON this general view of the Scripture, I would remark, how great a length of time, the whole re-

* Acts iii. 21. † Rev. x. 7. ‡ Dan. ii.
§ Dan. vii. 22. ** Rev. †† Dan. vii.

lation takes up, near ſix thouſand years of which are paſt: and how great a variety of things it treats of; the natural and moral ſyſtem or hiſtory of the world, including the time when it was formed, all contained in the very firſt book, and evidently written in a rude and unlearned age; and in ſubſequent books, the various common and prophetic hiſtory, and the particular diſpenſation of Chriſtianity. Now all this together gives the largeſt ſcope for criticiſm; and for confutation of what is capable of being confuted, either from reaſon or from common hiſtory, or from any inconſiſtence in its ſeveral parts. And it is a thing which deſerves, I think, to be mentioned, that whereas ſome imagine, the ſuppoſed doubtfulneſs of the evidence for Revelation implies a poſitive argument that it is not true; it appears, on the contrary, to imply a poſitive argument that it is true. For, could any common relation, of ſuch antiquity, extent, and variety (for in theſe things the ſtreſs of what I am now obſerving lies) be propoſed to the examination of the world: that it could not, in an age of knowledge and liberty, be confuted, or ſhewn to have nothing in it, to the ſatisfaction of reaſonable men; this would be thought a ſtrong preſumptive proof of its truth. And indeed it muſt be a proof of it, juſt in proportion to the probability, that if it were falſe, it might be ſhewn to be ſo: and this, I think, is ſcarce pretended to be ſhewn, but upon principles and in ways of arguing, which have been clearly obviated *. Nor does it at all appear, that any ſett of men who

* Ch. ii. iii; etc.

believe natural Religion, are of the opinion, that Chriſtianity has been thus confuted. But to proceed:

32

TOGETHER with the moral Syſtem of the world, the Old Teſtament contains a chronological account of the beginning of it, and from thence, an unbroken genealogy of mankind for many ages before common hiſtory begins; and carried on as much farther, as to make up a continued thread of hiſtory of the length of between three and four thouſand years. It contains an account of God's making covenant with a particular nation, that they ſhould be his people, and He would be their God, in a peculiar ſenſe; of his often interpoſing miraculouſly in their affairs; giving them the promiſe, and, long after, the poſſeſſion, of a particular country; aſſuring them of the greateſt national proſperity in it, if they would worſhip him, in oppoſition to the idols which the reſt of the world worſhipped, and obey his commands; and threatning them with unexampled puniſhments, if they diſobeyed him, and fell into the general idolatry: inſomuch that this one nation ſhould continue to be the obſervation and the wonder of all the world. It declares particularly, that *God would ſcatter them among all people, from one end of the earth unto the other:* but that *when they ſhould return unto the Lord their God, he would have compaſſion upon them, and gather them from all the nations, whither he had ſcattered them:* that *Iſrael ſhould be ſaved in the Lord, with an everlaſting ſalvation; and not be a-*

ſhamed or confounded world without end. And as ſome of theſe promiſes are conditional, others are as abſolute, as any thing can be expreſſed: That the time ſhould come, when *the people ſhould be all righteous, and inherit the land for ever*: that *though God would make a full end of all nations whither he had ſcattered them, yet would he not make a full end of them*: that *he would bring again the captivity of his people Iſrael, and plant them upon their land, and they ſhould be no more pulled up out of their land:* that *the ſeed of Iſrael ſhould not ceaſe from being a nation for ever* *. It foretells, that God would raiſe them up a particular perſon, in whom all his promiſes ſhould finally be fulfilled; the Meſſiah, who ſhould be, in an high and eminent ſenſe, their anointed Prince and Saviour. This was foretold in ſuch a manner, as raiſed a general expectation of ſuch a perſon in the nation, as appears from the New Teſtament, and is an acknowledged fact; an expectation of his coming at ſuch a particular time, before any one appeared claiming to be that perſon, and when there was no ground for ſuch an expectation but from the prophecies: which expectation, therefore, muſt in all reaſon be preſumed to be explanatory of thoſe prophecies, if there were any doubt about their meaning. It ſeems moreover to foretel, that this perſon ſhould be rejected by that nation, to whom he had been ſo long promiſed, and though he was ſo much deſired by

* Deut. xxviii. 64. Ch. xxx. 2, 3. Iſa. xlv. 17. Ch. lx. 21. Jer. xxx. 11. Ch. xlvi. 28. Amos ix. 15. Jer. xxxi. 36.

them *. And it expreſſly foretells, that he ſhould be the Saviour of the Gentiles; and even that the completion of the ſcheme, contained in this book, and then begun, and in its progreſs, ſhould be ſomewhat ſo great, that, in compariſon with it, the reſtoration of the Jews alone would be but of ſmall account. *It is a light thing that thou ſhouldeſt be my ſervant to raiſe up the tribes of Jacob, and to reſtore the preſerved of Iſrael: I will alſo give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayeſt be for ſalvation unto the end of the earth.* And, *In the laſt days, the mountain of the Lord's houſe ſhall be eſtabliſhed in the top of the mountains, and ſhall be exalted above the hills; and all nations ſhall flow into it——for out of Zion ſhall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jeruſalem. And he ſhall judge among the nations——and the Lord alone ſhall be exalted in that day, and the idols he ſhall utterly aboliſh* †. The Scripture farther contains an account, that at the time the Meſſiah was expected, a perſon roſe up, in this nation, claiming to be that Meſſiah, to be the perſon, whom all the prophecies referred to, and in whom they ſhould center: that he ſpent ſome years in a continued courſe of miraculous works; and endued his immediate diſciples and followers, with a power of doing the

* Iſa. viii. 14, 15. Ch. xlix. 5. Ch. liii. Mal. i. 10, 11. and Ch. iii.

† Iſa. xlix. 6. Ch. ii. Ch. xi. Ch. lvi. 7. Mal. i. 11. To which muſt be added, the other prophecies of the like kind, ſeveral in the New Teſtament, and very many in the Old; which deſcribe what ſhall be the completion of the revealed plan of providence.

ſame, as a proof of the truth of that Religion, which he commiſſioned them to publiſh: that, inveſted with this authority and power, they made numerous converts in the remoteſt countries, and ſettled and eſtabliſhed his Religion in the world; to the end of which, the Scripture profeſſes to give a prophetic account of the ſtate of this Religion amongſt mankind.

LET us now ſuppoſe a perſon utterly ignorant of hiſtory, to have all this related to him, out of the Scripture. Or ſuppoſe ſuch an one, having the Scripture put into his hands, to remark theſe things in it, not knowing but that the whole, even its civil hiſtory, as well as the other parts of it, might be, from beginning to end, an entire invention; and to aſk, what truth was in it, and whether the Revelation here related, was real or a fiction? And inſtead of a direct anſwer, ſuppoſe him, all at once, to be told the following confeſt facts; and then to unite them into one view.

LET him firſt be told, in how great a degree the profeſſion and eſtabliſhment of natural Religion, the belief that there is one God to be worſhipped, that virtue is his law, and that mankind ſhall be rewarded and puniſhed hereafter, as they obey and diſobey it here; in how very great a degree, I ſay, the profeſſion and eſtabliſhment of this moral Syſtem in the world, is owing to the Revelation, whether real or ſuppoſed, contained in this book: the eſtabliſhment of this moral Syſtem, even in thoſe countries which do not acknowledge the proper autho-

rity of the Scripture *. Let him be told alſo, what number of nations do acknowledge its proper authority. Let him then take in the conſideration, of what Importance Religion is to mankind. And upon theſe things, he might, I think, truly obſerve, that this ſuppoſed Revelation's obtaining and being received in the world, with all the circumſtances and effects of it, conſidered together as one event, is the moſt conſpicuous and important event in the ſtory of mankind: that a book of this nature, and thus promulged and recommended to our conſideration, demands, as if by a voice from heaven, to have its claims moſt ſeriouſly examined into: and that, before ſuch examination, to treat it with any kind of ſcoffing and ridicule, is an offence againſt natural piety. But it is to be remembred, that how much ſoever the eſtabliſhment of natural Religion in the world is owing to the Scripture-revelation, this does not deſtroy the proof of Religion from reaſon; any more than the proof of *Euclid's Elements* is deſtroyed, by a man's knowing or thinking, that he ſhould never have ſeen the truth of the ſeveral propoſitions contained in it, nor had thoſe propoſitions come into his thoughts, but for that Mathematician.

LET ſuch a perſon as we are ſpeaking of, be, in the next place, informed, of the acknowledged antiquity of the firſt parts of this book: And that its chronology, its account of the time when the earth,

* Pag. 162.

and the ſeveral parts of it, were firſt peopled with human creatures, is no way contradicted, but is really confirmed, by the natural and civil hiſtory of the world, collected from common hiſtorians, from the ſtate of the earth, and from the late invention of arts and ſciences. And as the Scripture contains an unbroken thread of common and civil hiſtory, from the creation to the captivity, for between three and four thouſand years: Let the perſon we are ſpeaking of be told in the next place, that this general hiſtory, as it is not contradicted, but is confirmed by prophane hiſtory as much as there would be reaſon to expect, upon ſuppoſition of its truth; ſo there is nothing in the whole hiſtory *itſelf*, to give any reaſonable ground of ſuſpicion, of its not being, in the general, a faithful and literally true genealogy of men, and ſeries of things. I ſpeak here only of the common Scripture hiſtory, or of the courſe of ordinary events related in it; as diſtinguiſhed from miracles, and from the prophetic hiſtory. In all the Scripture-narrations of this kind, following events ariſe out of foregoing ones, as in all other hiſtories. There appears nothing related as done in any age, not conformable to the manners of that age: nothing in the account of a ſucceeding age, which, one would ſay, could not be true, or was improbable, from the account of things in the preceeding one. There is nothing in the characters, which would raiſe a thought of their being feigned; but all the internal marks imaginable of their being real. It is to be added alſo, that mere genealogies, bare narratives of the number of years, which perſons called by ſuch and ſuch names lived, do not

carry the face of fiction; perhaps do carry ſome preſumption of veracity: and all unadorned narratives, which have nothing to ſurprize, may be thought to carry ſomewhat of the like preſumption too. And the domeſtic and the political hiſtory is plainly credible. There may be incidents in Scripture, which taken alone in the naked way they are told, may appear ſtrange; eſpecially to perſons of other manners, temper, education: But there are alſo incidents of undoubted truth, in many or moſt perſons lives, which, in the ſame circumſtances, would appear to the full as ſtrange. There may be miſtakes of tranſcribers, there may be other real or ſeeming miſtakes, not eaſy to be particularly accounted for: But there are certainly no more things of this kind in the Scripture, than what were to have been expected in books of ſuch antiquity; and nothing, in any wiſe, ſufficient to diſcredit the general narrative. Now, that a hiſtory claiming to commence from the creation, and extending in one continued ſeries, through ſo great a length of time, and variety of events, ſhould have ſuch appearances of reality and truth in its whole contexture, is ſurely a very remarkable circumſtance in its favour. And as all this is applicable to the common hiſtory of the New Teſtament; ſo there is a farther credibility, and a very high one, given to it, by profane authors: many of theſe writing of the ſame times, and confirming the truth of cuſtoms and events, which are incidentally as well as more purpoſely mentioned in it. And this credibility of the common ſcripture-hiſtory, gives ſome credibility to its miraculous hiſtory: eſpecially as this is interwoven with the

common, ſo as that they imply each other, and both together make up one relation.

34. LET it then be more particularly obſerved to this perſon, that it is an acknowledged matter of fact, which is indeed implied in the foregoing obſervation, that there was ſuch a nation as the *Jews*, of the greateſt antiquity, whoſe government and general polity was founded on the law, here related to be given them by *Moſes* as from heaven: that Natural Religion, though with rites additional yet no way contrary to it, was their eſtabliſhed religion, which cannot be ſaid of the Gentile world: and that their very being as a nation, depended upon their acknowledgment of one God, the God of the Univerſe. For, ſuppoſe in their captivity in *Babylon*, they had gone over to the religion of their conquerors, there would have remained no bond of union, to keep them a diſtinct people. And whilſt they were under their own kings, in their own country, a total apoſtacy from God would have been the diſſolution of their whole government. They, in ſuch a ſenſe, nationally acknowledged and worſhipped the Maker of heaven and earth, when the reſt of the world were ſunk in idolatry, as rendered them, in fact, the peculiar people of God. And this ſo remarkable eſtabliſhment and preſervation of Natural Religion amongſt them, ſeems to add ſome peculiar credibility to the hiſtorical evidence for the miracles of *Moſes* and the prophets: Becauſe theſe miracles are a full ſatisfactory account of this event, which plainly wants to be accounted for, and cannot otherwiſe.

LET this perſon, ſuppoſed wholly ignorant of hiſtory, be acquainted farther, that one claiming to be the Meſſiah, of Jewiſh extraction, roſe up at the time when this nation, from the prophecies abovementioned, expected the Meſſiah: that he was rejected, as it ſeemed to have been foretold he ſhould, by the body of the people, under the direction of their rulers: that in the courſe of a very few years, he was believed on and acknowledged as the promiſed Meſſiah, by great numbers among the Gentiles, agreeably to the prophecies of Scripture, yet not upon the evidence of Prophecy, but of Miracles *, of which miracles we alſo have ſtrong hiſtorical evidence; (by which I mean here no more than muſt be acknowledged by unbelievers, for let pious frauds and follies be admitted to weaken, it is abſurd to ſay they deſtroy, our evidence of miracles wrought in proof of Chriſtianity †:) that this religion approving itſelf to the reaſon of mankind, and carrying its own evidence with it, ſo far as reaſon is a judge of its ſyſtem, and being no way contrary to reaſon, in thoſe parts of it which require to be believed upon the mere authority of its author; that this religion, I ſay, gradually ſpread and ſupported itſelf, for ſome hundred years, not only without any aſſiſtance from temporal power, but under conſtant diſcouragements, and often the bittereſt perſecutions from it; and then became the religion of the world: that in the mean time, the Jewiſh nation and government were deſtroyed, in a very remarkable

* Pag. 289, &c. † pag. 297, &c.

manner, and the people carried away captive and diſperſed through the moſt diſtant countries; in which ſtate of diſperſion, they have remained fifteen hundred years: and that they remain a numerous people, united amongſt themſelves, and diſtinguiſhed from the reſt of the world, as they were in the days of *Moſes*, by the profeſſion of his law; and every where looked upon in a manner, which one ſcarce knows how diſtinctly to expreſs, but in the words of the prophetic account of it, given ſo many ages before it came to paſs; *Thou ſhalt become an aſtoniſhment, a proverb, and a by-word, among all nations whither the Lord ſhall lead thee* *.

THE appearance of a ſtanding miracle, in the *Jews* remaining a diſtinct people in their diſperſion, and the confirmation which this event appears to give to the truth of Revelation; may be thought to be anſwered, by their religion's forbidding them intermarriages with thoſe of any other, and preſcribing them a great many peculiarities in their food, by which they are debarred from the means of incorporating with the people, in whoſe countries they live. This is not, I think, a ſatisfactory account of that which it pretends to account for. But what does it pretend to account for? The correſpondence between this event and the prophecies; or the coincidence of both, with a long diſpenſation of providence of a peculiar nature, towards that people formerly? No. It is only the event itſelf, which is offered to be thus accounted for; which ſingle event taken alone, abſtracted from all ſuch

* Deut. xxviii. 37.

correſpondence and coincidence, perhaps would not have appeared miraculous: but that correſpondence and coincidence may be ſo, though the event itſelf be ſuppoſed not. Thus the concurrence of our Saviour's being born at *Bethlehem*, with a long foregoing ſeries of prophecy and other coincidences, is doubtleſs miraculous, the ſeries of prophecy, and other coincidences, and the event, being admitted: though the even itſelf, his birth at that place, appears to have been brought about in a natural way; of which, however, no one can be certain.

AND as ſeveral of theſe events ſeem, in ſome degree expreſsly, to have verified the prophetic hiſtory already: ſo likewiſe they may be conſidered farther, as having a peculiar aſpect towards the full completion of it; as affording ſome preſumption that the whole of it ſhall, one time or other, be fulfilled. Thus, that the *Jews* have been ſo wonderfully preſerved in their long and wide diſperſion; which is indeed the direct fulfilling of ſome prophecies, but is now mentioned only as looking forward to ſomewhat yet to come: that Natural Religion came forth from *Judea*, and ſpread, in the degree it has done over the world, before loſt in idolatry; which, together with ſome other things, have diſtinguiſhed that very place, in like manner, as the people of it are diſtinguiſhed: that this great change of Religion over the earth, was brought about under the profeſſion and acknowledgment, that Jeſus was the promiſed Meſſiah: things of this kind naturally turn the thoughts of ſerious men, towards the full completion of the prophetic hiſtory, concerning the final reſtoration of that people; con-

cerning the eſtabliſhment of the everlaſting kingdom among them, the kingdom of the Meſſiah; and the future ſtate of the world, under this ſacred government. Such circumſtances and events compared with theſe prophecies, though no completions of them, yet would not, I think, be ſpoken of as nothing in the argument, by a perſon upon his firſt being informed of them. They fall in with the prophetic hiſtory of things ſtill future, give it ſome additional credibility, have the appearance of being ſomewhat in order to the full completion of it.

INDEED it requires a good degree of knowledge, and great calmneſs and conſideration, to be able to judge, thoroughly, of the evidence for the truth of Chriſtianity, from that part of the prophetic hiſtory, which relates to the ſituation of the kingdoms of the world, and to the ſtate of the church, from the eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity to the preſent time. But it appears, from a general view of it, to be very material. And thoſe perſons who have thoroughly examined it, and ſome of them were men of the coldeſt tempers, greateſt capacities, and leaſt liable to imputations of prejudice, inſiſt upon it as determinately concluſive.

SUPPOSE now a perſon quite ignorant of hiſtory, firſt to recollect the paſſages above-mentioned out of Scripture, without knowing but that the whole was a late fiction, then to be informed of the correſpondent facts now mentioned, and to unite them all into one view: that the profeſſion and eſtabliſhment of natural Religion in the world, is greatly owing,

in different ways, to this book, and the ſuppoſed Revelation which it contains; that it is acknowledged to be of the earlieſt antiquity; that its chronology and common hiſtory are entirely credible; that this antient nation, the *Jews*, of whom it chiefly treats, appear to have been, in fact, the people of God, in a diſtinguiſhed ſenſe; that, as there was a national expectation amongſt them, raiſed from the prophecies, of a Meſſiah to appear at ſuch a time, ſo one at this time appeared claiming to be that Meſſiah; that he was rejected by this nation; but received by the Gentiles, not upon the evidence of Prophecy, but of Miracles; that the Religion he taught ſupported itſelf under the greateſt difficulties, gained ground, and at length became the Religion of the world; that in the mean time the Jewiſh polity was utterly deſtroyed, and the nation diſperſed over the face of the earth; that notwithſtanding this, they have remained a diſtinct numerous people for ſo many centuries, even to this day; which not only appears to be the expreſs completion of ſeveral prophecies concerning them; but alſo renders it, as one may ſpeak, a viſible and eaſy poſſibility, that the promiſes made to them as a nation, may yet be fulfilled. And to theſe acknowledged truths, let the perſon we have been ſuppoſing, add, as I think he ought, whether every one will allow it or no, the obvious appearances which there are, of the ſtate of the world, in other reſpects beſides what relates to the *Jews*, and of the Chriſtian church, having ſo long anſwered, and ſtill anſwering to the prophetic hiſtory. Suppoſe, I ſay, theſe

facts ſet over-againſt the things before-mentioned out of the Scripture, and ſeriouſly compared with them; the joint view of both together, muſt, I think, appear of very great weight to a conſiderate reaſonable perſon: of much greater indeed, upon having them firſt laid before him, than is eaſy for us, who are ſo familiariſed to them, to conceive, without ſome particular attention for that purpoſe.

ALL theſe things, and the ſeveral particulars contained under them, require to be diſtinctly and moſt thoroughly examined into; that the weight of each may be judged of, upon ſuch examination, and ſuch concluſion drawn as reſults from their united force. But this has not been attempted here. I have gone no farther than to ſhow, that the general imperfect view of them now given, the conſeſt hiſtorical evidence for Miracles, and the many obvious appearing completions of Prophecy, together with the collateral things * here mentioned, and there are ſeveral others of the like ſort; that all this together, which, being fact, muſt be acknowledged by unbelievers, amounts to real evidence of ſomewhat more than human in this matter: evidence much more important, than careleſs men, who have been accuſtomed only to tranſient and partial views of it, can imagine; and indeed abundantly ſufficient to act upon. And theſe things, I apprehend, muſt be acknowledged by unbelievers. For though they may ſay, that the hiſtorical evidence of Miracles wrought in atteſtation of Chriſtianity, is not

* All the particular things mentioned in this chapter, not reducible to the head, of certain miracles, or determinate completions of prophecy. See p. 283, 284.

ſufficient to convince them that ſuch Miracles were really wrought; they cannot deny, that there is ſuch hiſtorical evidence, it being a known matter of fact, that there is. They may ſay, the conformity between the prophecies and events, is by accident: but there are many inſtances, in which ſuch conformity itſelf cannot be denied. They may ſay, with regard to ſuch kind of collateral things as thoſe above-mentioned, that any odd accidental events, without meaning, will have a meaning found in them by fanciful people; and that ſuch as are fanciful in any one certain way, will make out a thouſand coincidences, which ſeem to favour their peculiar follies. Men, I ſay, may talk thus: but no one who is ſerious, can poſſibly think theſe things to be nothing, if he conſiders the importance of collateral things, and even of leſſer circumſtances, in the evidence of probability, as diſtinguiſhed, in nature, from the evidence of demonſtration. In many caſes indeed it ſeems to require the trueſt judgment, to determine with exactneſs the weight of circumſtantial evidence: but it is very often altogether as convincing, as that, which is the moſt expreſs and direct.

* THIS general view of the evidence for Chriſtianity, conſidered as making one argument, may alſo ſerve to recommend to ſerious perſons, to ſet down every thing, which they think may be of any real weight at all in proof of it, and particularly

*See above page 292, which is referred to here.

the many ſeeming completions of prophecy: and they will find, that judging by the natural rules, by which we judge of probable evidence in common matters, they amount to a much higher degree of proof, upon ſuch a joint review, than could be ſuppoſed upon conſidering them ſeparately, at different times; how ſtrong ſoever the proof might before appear to them, upon ſuch ſeparate views of it. For probable proofs, by being added, not only increaſe the evidence, but multiply it. Nor ſhould I diſſuade any one from ſetting down, what he thought made for the contrary ſide. But then it is to be remembred, not in order to influence his judgment, but his practice, that a miſtake on one ſide, may be, in its conſequences, much more dangerous, than a miſtake on the other. And what courſe is moſt ſafe, and what moſt dangerous, is a conſideration thought very material, when we deliberate, not concerning events, but concerning conduct in our temporal affairs. To be influenced by this conſideration in our judgment, to believe or diſbelieve upon it, is indeed as much prejudice, as any thing whatever. And, like other prejudices, it operates contrary ways, in different men. For ſome are inclined to believe, what they hope; and others, what they fear. And it is manifeſt unreaſonableneſs, to apply to men's paſſions in order to gain their aſſent. But in deliberations concerning conduct, there is nothing which reaſon more requires to be taken into the account, than the importance of it. For, ſuppoſe it doubtful, what would be the conſequence of acting in this, or in a contrary manner: ſtill, that taking one ſide could

be attended with little or no bad conſequence, and taking the other might be attended with the greateſt, muſt appear, to unprejudiced reaſon, of the higheſt moment towards determining, how we are to act. But the truth of our Religion, like the truth of common matters, is to be judged of by al the evidence taken together. And unleſs the whole ſeries of things which may be alledged in this argument, and every particular thing in it, can reaſonably be ſuppoſed to have been by accident; (for here the ſtreſs of the argument for Chriſtianity lies;) then is the truth of it proved: In like manner, as if in any common caſe, numerous events acknowledged, were to be alledged in proof of any other event diſputed; the truth of the diſputed event would be proved, not only if any one of the acknowledged ones did of itſelf clearly imply it, but, though no one of them ſingly did ſo, if the whole of the acknowledged events taken together, could not in reaſon be ſuppoſed to have happened, unleſs the diſputed one were true.

IT is obvious, how much advantage, the nature of this evidence gives to thoſe perſons, who attack Chriſtianity, eſpecially in converſation. For it is eaſy to ſhew, in a ſhort and lively manner, that ſuch and ſuch things are liable to objection, that this and another thing, is of little weight in itſelf; but impoſſible to ſhew, in like manner, the united force of the whole argument in one view.

HOWEVER, laſtly, as it has been made appear,

that there is no presumption against a Revelation as miraculous; that the general scheme of Christianity, and the principal parts of it, are conformable to the experienced constitution of things, and the whole perfectly credible: So the account now given of the positive evidence for it, shews, that this evidence is such, as, from the nature of it, cannot be destroyed; though it should be lessened.

PART II.

CHAP. VIII.

Of the Objections which may be made againſt arguing from the Analogy of Nature, to Religion.

IF every one would conſider with ſuch attention as they are bound, even in point of morality, to conſider, what they judge and give characters of; the occaſion of this chapter would be, in ſome good meaſure at leaſt, ſuperſeded. But ſince this is not to be expected; for ſome we find do not concern themſelves to underſtand even what they write againſt: ſince this treatiſe, in common with moſt others, lies open to objections, which may appear very material to thoughtful men at firſt ſight; and, beſides that, ſeems peculiarly liable to the objections of ſuch as can judge without thinking, and of ſuch as can cenſure without judging; it may not be amiſs to ſet down the chief of theſe objections which occur to me, and conſider them to their hands. And they are ſuch as theſe;

" THAT it is a poor thing to ſolve difficulties in " Revelation, by ſaying, that there are the ſame in " Natural Religion; when what is wanting is to " clear both of them, of theſe their common, as

" well as other their reſpective, difficulties: but " that it is a ſtrange way indeed of convincing men " of the obligations of Religion, to ſhew them, " that they have as little reaſon for their worldly " purſuits: and a ſtrange way of vindicating the " juſtice and goodneſs of the Author of Nature, " and of removing the objections againſt both, to " which the Syſtem of Religion lies open, to ſhew, " that the like objections lie againſt natural pro- " vidence; a way of anſwering objections againſt " Religion, without ſo much as pretending to make " out, that the Syſtem of it, or the particular " things in it objected againſt, are reaſonable—— " eſpecially, perhaps ſome may be inattentive e- " nough to add, muſt this be thought ſtrange, when " it is confeſſed that analogy is no anſwer to ſuch " objections: that when this ſort of reaſoning is " carried to the utmoſt length it can be imagined " capable of, it will yet leave the mind in a very " unſatisfied ſtate: and that it muſt be unaccoun- " table ignorance of mankind, to imagine they will " be prevailed with to forego their preſent intereſts " and pleaſures from regard to Religion, upon " doubtful evidence."

Now, as plauſible as this way of talking may appear, that appearance will be found in a great meaſure owing to half-views, which ſhew but part of an object, yet ſhew that indiſtinctly; and to undeterminate language. By theſe means weak men are often deceived by others, and ludicrous men, by themſelves. And even thoſe, who are ſerious and conſiderate, cannot always readily diſintangle, and

at once clearly ſee through the perplexities, in which ſubjects themſelves are involved; and which are heightened by the deficiencies and the abuſe of words. To this latter ſort of perſons, the following reply to each part of this objection ſeverally, may be of ſome aſſiſtance; as it may alſo tend a little to ſtop and ſilence others.

Firſt, THE thing wanted, *i. e.* what men require, is to have all difficulties cleared. And this is, or at leaſt for any thing we know to the contrary, it may be, the ſame, as requiring to comprehend the Divine nature, and the whole plan of Providence from everlaſting to everlaſting. But it hath always been allowed to argue, from what is acknowledged, to what is diſputed. And it is in no other ſenſe a poor thing, to argue from Natural Religion to Revealed, in the manner found fault with, than it is to argue in numberleſs other ways of probable deduction and inference, in matters of conduct, which we are continually reduced to the neceſſity of doing. Indeed the epithet *poor*, may be applied, I fear as properly, to great part or the whole of human life, as it is to the things mentioned in the objection. Is it not a poor thing, for a phyſician to have ſo little knowledge in the cure of diſeaſes, as even the moſt eminent have? to act upon conjecture and gueſs, where the life of man is concerned? Undoubtedly it is: but not in compariſon of having no ſkill at all in that uſeful art, and being obliged to act wholly in the dark.

FURTHER: Since it is as unreaſonable, as it is com-

mon, to urge objections againſt Revelation, which are of equal weight againſt Natural Religion; and thoſe who do this, if they are not confuted themſelves, deal unfairly with others, in making it ſeem, that they are arguing only againſt Revelation, or particular doctrines of it, when in reality they are arguing againſt moral providence; it is a thing of conſequence to ſhow, that ſuch objections are as much levelled againſt Natural Religion, as againſt Revealed. And objections, which are equally applicable to both, are properly ſpeaking anſwered, by its being ſhewn that they are ſo, provided the former be admitted to be true. And without taking in the conſideration how diſtinctly this is admitted, it is plainly very material to obſerve, that as the things objected againſt in Natural Religion, are of the ſame kind with what is certain matter of experience in the courſe of providence, and in the information which God affords us concerning our temporal intereſt under his government; ſo the objections againſt the ſyſtem of Chriſtianity and the evidence of it, are of the very ſame kind with thoſe which are made againſt the ſyſtem and evidence of Natural Religion. However, the reader upon review may ſee, that moſt of the analogies inſiſted upon, even in the latter part of this treatiſe, do not neceſſarily require to have more taken for granted than is in the former; that there is an Author of Nature, or natural Governor of the world: and Chriſtianity is vindicated, not from its analogy to Natural Religion, but chiefly, from its analogy to the experienced conſtitution of Nature.

Secondly, RELIGION is a practical thing, and conſiſts in ſuch a determinate courſe of life; as being what there is reaſon to think, is commanded by the Author of Nature, and will, upon the whole, be our happineſs under His government. Now if men can be convinced, that they have the like reaſon to believe this, as to believe, that taking care of their temporal affairs will be to their advantage; ſuch conviction cannot but be an argument to them for the practice of religion. And if there be really any reaſon for believing one of theſe, and endeavouring to preſerve life, and ſecure ourſelves the neceſſaries and conveniencies of it: Then there is reaſon alſo for believing the other, and endeavouring to ſecure the intereſt it propoſes to us. And if the intereſt, which religion propoſes to us, be infinitely greater than our whole temporal intereſt; then there muſt be proportionably greater reaſon, for endeavouring to ſecure one, than the other: ſince, by the ſuppoſition, the probability of our ſecuring one, is equal to the probability of our ſecuring the other. This ſeems plainly unanſwerable; and has a tendency to influence fair minds, who conſider what our condition really is, or upon what evidence we are naturally appointed to act; and who are diſpoſed to acquieſce in the terms upon which we live, and attend to and follow that practical inſtruction, whatever it be, which is afforded us.

BUT the chief and proper force of the argument referred to in the objection, lies in another place. For, it is ſaid that the proof of religion is involved in ſuch inextricable difficulties, as to render it doubt-

ful; and that it cannot be ſuppoſed, that if it were true, it would be left upon doubtful evidence. Here then, over and above the force of each particular difficulty or objection, theſe difficulties and objections taken together, areturn ed into a poſitive argument againſt the truth of religion: which argument would ſtand thus. If religion were true, it would not be left doubtful, and open to objections to the degree in which it is: therefore that it is thus left, not only renders the evidence of it weak, and leſſens its force, in proportion to the weight of ſuch objections; but alſo ſhews it to be falſe, or is a general preſumption of its being ſo. Now the obſervation, that from the natural conſtitution and courſe of things, we muſt in our temporal concerns, almoſt continually, and in matters of great conſequence, act upon evidence of a like kind and degree to the evidence of religion; is an anſwer to this argument: becauſe it ſhews, that it is according to the conduct and character of the Author of Nature, to appoint that we ſhould act upon evidence like to that, which this argument preſumes, He cannot be ſuppoſed to appoint we ſhould act upon: It is an inſtance, a general one made up of numerous particular ones, of ſomewhat in his dealing with us, ſimilar to what is ſaid to be incredible. And as the force of this anſwer lies merely in the parallel, which there is between the evidence for religion and for our temporal conduct; the anſwer is equally juſt and concluſive, whether the parallel be made out, by ſhewing the evidence of the former to be higher, or the evidence of the latter to be lower.

Thirdly, The deſign of this treatiſe is not to vindicate the character of God, but to ſhew the obligations of men: It is not to juſtify his providence, but to ſhew what belongs to us to do. Theſe are two ſubjects, and ought not to be confounded. And though they may at length run up into each other, yet obſervations may immediately tend to make out the latter, which do not appear, by any immediate connexion, to the purpoſe of the former; which is leſs our concern than many ſeem to think. For, 1ſt. It is not neceſſary we ſhould juſtify the diſpenſations of Providence againſt objections, any farther than to ſhew, that the things objected againſt may, for aught we know, be conſiſtent with juſtice and goodneſs. Suppoſe then, that there are things in the ſyſtem of this world, and plan of Providence relating to it, which taken alone would be unjuſt: yet it has been ſhewn unanſwerably, that if we could take in the reference, which theſe things may have, to other things preſent, paſt and to come; to the whole ſcheme, which the things objected againſt are parts of; theſe very things might, for aught we know, be found to be, not only conſiſtent with juſtice, but inſtances of it. Indeed it has been ſhewn, by the analogy of what we ſee, not only poſſible that this may be the caſe, but credible that it is. And thus objections, drawn from ſuch things, are anſwered, and Providence is vindicated, as far as religion makes its vindication neceſſary. Hence it appears, 2dly, that objections againſt the divine juſtice and goodneſs are not endeavoured to be removed, by ſhewing that the like objections, allowed to be really

concluſive, lie againſt natural Providence: but thoſe objections being ſuppoſed and ſhewn not to be concluſive, the things objected againſt, conſidered as matters of fact, are farther ſhewn to be credible, from their conformity to the conſtitution of nature; for inſtance, that God will reward and puniſh men for their actions hereafter, from the obſervation, that he does reward and puniſh them for their actions here. And this, I apprehend, is of weight. And I add, 3dly, It would be of weight, even though thoſe objections were not anſwered. For, there being the proof of religion above ſet down; and religion implying ſeveral facts; for inſtance again, the fact laſt mentioned, that God will reward and puniſh men for their actions hereafter; the obſervation that his preſent method of government is by rewards and puniſhments, ſhews that future fact not to be incredible: whatever objections men may think they have againſt it, as unjuſt or unmerciful, according to their notions of juſtice and mercy; or as improbable from their belief of Neceſſity. I ſay, *as improbable*: for it is evident no objection againſt it, *as unjuſt*, can be urged from Neceſſity; ſince this notion as much deſtroys injuſtice, as it does juſtice. Then 4thly, Though objections againſt the reaſonableneſs of the ſyſtem of religion, cannot indeed be anſwered without entering into conſideration of its reaſonableneſs; yet objections againſt the credibility or truth of it, may. Becauſe the ſyſtem of it is reducible into what is properly matter of fact: And the truth, the probable truth, of facts, may be ſhewn without conſideration of their reaſonableneſs. Nor is it neceſſary, though, in ſome

caſes and reſpects, it is highly uſeful and proper, yet it is not neceſſary, to give a proof of the reaſonableneſs of every precept injoined us, and of every particular diſpenſation of Providence, which comes into the ſyſtem of religion. Indeed the more thoroughly a perſon of a right diſpoſition is convinced of the perfection of the divine nature and conduct, the farther he will advance towards that perfection of Religion, which St. *John* * ſpeaks of. But the general obligations of religion are fully made out, by proving the reaſonableneſs of the practice of it. And that the practice of religion *is* reaſonable, may be ſhewn, though no more could be proved, than that the ſyſtem of it *may be* ſo, for aught we know to the contrary: and even without entering into the diſtinct conſideration of this. And from hence, 5thly, It is eaſy to ſee, that though the Analogy of Nature is not an immediate anſwer to objections againſt the wiſdom, the juſtice or goodneſs, of any doctrine or precept of religion: yet it may be, as it is, an immediate and direct anſwer to what is really intended by ſuch objections; which is, to ſhew that the things objected againſt are incredible.

Fourthly, It is moſt readily acknowledged, that the foregoing treatiſe is by no means ſatisfactory; very far indeed from it: but ſo would any natural inſtitution of life appear, if reduced into a ſyſtem, together with its evidence. Leaving religion out of

* 2 John iv. 18.

the caſe, men are divided in their opinions, whether our pleaſures overballance our pains: And whether it be, or be not, eligible to live in this world. And were all ſuch controverſies ſettled, which perhaps, in ſpeculation, would be found involved in great difficulties; and were it determined upon the evidence of reaſon, as Nature has determined it to our hands, that life is to be preſerved: Yet ſtill, the rules which God has been pleaſed to afford us, for eſcaping the miſeries of it and obtaining its ſatisfactions, the rules, for inſtance, of preſerving health and recovering it when loſt, are not only fallible and precarious, but very far from being exact. Nor are we informed by Nature, in future contingencies and accidents, ſo as to render it at all certain, what is the beſt method of managing our affairs. What will be the ſucceſs of our temporal purſuits, in the common ſenſe of the word ſucceſs, is highly doubtful. And what will be the ſucceſs of them, in the proper ſenſe of the word; *i. e.* what happineſs or enjoyment we ſhall obtain by them, is doubtful in a much higher degree. Indeed the unſatisfactory nature of the evidence, with which we are obliged to take up, in the daily courſe of life, is ſcarce to be expreſſed. Yet men do not throw away life, or diſregard the intereſts of it, upon account of this doubtfulneſs. The evidence of religion then being admitted real, thoſe who object againſt it as not ſatisfactory, *i. e.* as not being what they wiſh it, plainly forget the very condition of our being: For ſatisfaction, in this ſenſe, does not belong to ſuch a creature as man. And, which is more material, they forget alſo the very nature of religion.

For, Religion preſuppoſes, in all thoſe who will embrace it, a certain degree of integrity and honeſty; which it was intended to try whether men have or not, and to exerciſe in ſuch as have it, in order to its improvement. Religion preſuppoſes this as much, and in the ſame ſenſe, as ſpeaking to a man, preſuppoſes he underſtands the language in which you ſpeak; or as warning a man of any danger, preſuppoſes that he hath ſuch a regard to himſelf, as that he will endeavour to avoid it. And therefore the queſtion is not at all, whether the evidence of religion be ſatisfactory: but whether it be, in reaſon, ſufficient to prove and diſcipline that virtue, which it preſuppoſes. Now the evidence of it is fully ſufficient for all thoſe purpoſes of probation; how far ſoever it is from being ſatisfactory, as to the purpoſes of curioſity, or any other: and indeed it anſwers the purpoſes of the former in ſeveral reſpects, which it would not do, if it were as overbearing as is required. One might add farther: that whether the motives or the evidence for any courſe of action be ſatisfactory, meaning here by that word, what ſatisfies a man, that ſuch a courſe of action will in the event be for his good; this need never be, and I think, ſtrictly ſpeaking, never is, the practical queſtion in common matters. But the practical queſtion in all caſes, is, whether the evidence for a courſe of action be ſuch, as, taking in all circumſtances, makes the faculty within us, which is the guide and judge of conduct *, deter-

* See Diſſert. II.

mine that courſe of action to be prudent. Indeed ſatisfaction that it will be for our intereſt or happineſs, abundantly determines an action to be prudent: But evidence almoſt infinitely lower than this, determines actions to be ſo too; even in the conduct of every day.

Fifthly, As to the objection concerning the influence which this argument, or any part of it, may or may not, be expected to have upon men; I obſerve, as above, that religion being intended for a trial and exerciſe of the morality of every perſon's character, who is a ſubject of it: and there being, as I have ſhewn, ſuch evidence for it, as is ſufficient, in reaſon, to influence men to embrace it: To object, that it is not to be imagined mankind will be influenced by ſuch evidence, is nothing to the purpoſe of the foregoing treatiſe. For the purpoſe of it is, not to enquire, what ſort of creatures mankind are; but what, the light and knowledge, which is afforded them, requires they ſhould be: to ſhew how, in reaſon, they ought to behave; not how, in fact, they will behave. This depends upon themſelves, and is their own concern; the perſonal concern of each man in particular. And how little regard the generality have to it, experience indeed does too fully ſhew. But Religion, conſidered as a Probation, has had its end upon all perſons, to whom it has been propoſed with evidence ſufficient in reaſon to influence their practice: For by this means they have been put into a ſtate of probation; let them behave as they will in it. And thus, not only Revelation, but Reaſon alſo, teaches us, that by the evidence of Religion being laid before

men, the deſigns of Providence are carrying on, not only with regard to thoſe who will, but likewiſe with regard to thoſe who will not, be influenced by it. However, Laſtly, The objection here referred to, allows the things inſiſted upon in this treatiſe to be of ſome weight: And if ſo, it may be hoped it will have ſome influence. And if there be a probability that it will have any at all, there is the ſame reaſon in kind, though not in degree, to lay it before men, as there would be, if it were likely to have a greater influence.

And farther, I deſire it may be conſidered, with reſpect to the whole of the foregoing objections, that in this treatiſe I have argued upon the principles of others *, not my own: and have omitted what I think true, and of the utmoſt importance, becauſe by others thought unintelligible, or not true. Thus I have argued upon the principles of the Fataliſts, which I do not believe, and have omitted a thing of the utmoſt importance which I do believe, the moral Fitneſs and Unfitneſs of actions, prior to all Will whatever; which I apprehend as certainly to determine the Divine Conduct, as ſpeculative Truth and Falſe-hood neceſſarily determine the Divine Judgment. Indeed the principle of Liberty and that of moral Fitneſs ſo force themſelves upon the mind, that moraliſts, the antients as well as moderns, have formed

* By *arguing upon the principles of others*, the reader will obſerve is meant; not proving any thing *from* thoſe principles, but *notwithſtanding* them. Thus religion is proved, not *from* the opinion of Neceſſity; which is abſurd: but, *notwithſtanding* or *even though* that opinion were admitted to be true.

their language upon it. And probably it may appear in mine: though I have endeavoured to avoid it; and in order to avoid it, have ſometimes been obliged to expreſs myſelf in a manner, which will appear ſtrange to ſuch as do not obſerve the reaſon for it: but the general argument here purſued, does not at all ſuppoſe, or proceed upon, theſe principles. Now, theſe two abſtract principles of Liberty and moral Fitneſs being omitted, Religion can be conſidered in no other view, than meerly as a queſtion of fact: and in this view, it is here conſidered. It is obvious, that Chriſtianity, and the proof of it, are both hiſtorical. And even Natural Religion is, properly, a matter of fact. For, that there is a righteous Governor of the world, is ſo: and this propoſition contains the general ſyſtem of Natural Religion. But then, ſeveral abſtract truths, and in particular theſe two principles, are uſually taken into conſideration in the proof of it: whereas it is here treated of only as a matter of fact. To explain this: that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones, is an abſtract truth: but that they appear ſo to our mind, is only a matter of fact. And this laſt muſt have been admitted, if any thing was, by thoſe ancient Scepticks, who would not have admitted the former; but pretended to doubt, whether there were any ſuch thing as truth, or whether we could certainly depend upon our faculties of underſtanding for the knowledge of it, in any caſe. So likewiſe, that there is, in the nature of things, an original ſtandard of Right and Wrong in actions, independent upon all Will, but which unalterably determines the will of God, to exerciſe that moral government over the world

which religion teaches, *i. e.* finally and upon the whole to reward and puniſh men reſpectively as they act right or wrong; this aſſertion contains an abſtract truth, as well as matter of fact. But ſuppoſe in the preſent ſtate, every man, without exception, was rewarded and puniſhed, in exact proportion, as he followed or tranſgreſſed that Senſe of Right and Wrong, which God has implanted in the nature of every man: this would not be at all an abſtract truth, but only a matter of fact. And though this fact were acknowledged by every one; yet the very ſame difficulties might be raiſed, as are now, concerning the abſtract queſtions of Liberty and moral Fitneſs: And we ſhould have a proof, even the certain one of experience, that the government of the world was perfectly moral, without taking in the conſideration of thoſe queſtions: and this proof would remain, in what way ſoever they were determined. And thus, God having given mankind a moral faculty, the object of which is actions, and which naturally approves ſome actions as right and of good deſert, and condemns others as wrong, and of ill-deſert; that He will, finally and upon the whole, reward the former and puniſh the latter, is not an aſſertion of an abſtract truth, but of what is as meer a fact, as his doing ſo at preſent would be. This future fact I have, not indeed proved with the force with which it might be proved, from the principles of Liberty and moral Fitneſs; but without them have given a really concluſive practical proof of it, which is greatly ſtrengthened by the general analogy of nature: a proof, eaſily cavilled at, eaſily ſhewn not to be demonſtrative, for it is

not offered at ſuch; but impoſſible, I think, to be evaded or anſwered. And thus the obligations of religion are made out, excluſively of the queſtions concerning Liberty and moral Fitneſs; which have been perplexed with difficulties and abſtruſe reaſonings, as every thing may.

Hence therefore may be obſerved diſtinctly, what is the force of this treatiſe. It will be, to ſuch as are convinced of religion upon the proof ariſing out of the two laſt mentioned principles, an additional proof and a confirmation of it: To ſuch as do not admit thoſe principles, an original proof of it *, and a confirmation of that proof. Thoſe who believe, will here find the ſcheme of Chriſtianity cleared of objections, and the evidence of it in a peculiar manner ſtrengthened: thoſe who do not believe, will at leaſt be ſhewn the abſurdity of all attempts to prove Chriſtianity falſe, the plain undoubted credibility of it; and, I hope, a good deal more.

And thus, though ſome perhaps may ſeriouſly think, that analogy, as here urged, has too great ſtreſs laid upon it; and ridicule, unanſwerable ridicule, may be applied, to ſhew the argument from it in a diſadvantageous light; yet there can be no queſtion, but that it is a real one. For religion, both natural and revealed, implying in it numerous facts; analogy, being a confirmation of all facts to which it can be applied, as it is the only proof of

* pag. 137, etc.

moſt, cannot but be admitted by every one to be a material thing, and truly of weight on the ſide of religion, both natural and revealed: and it ought to be particularly regarded by ſuch as profeſs to follow Nature, and to be leſs ſatisfied with abſtract Reaſonings.

CONCLUSION.

WHATEVER account may be given, of the ſtrange inattention and diſregard, in ſome ages and countries, to a matter of ſuch importance as Religion; it would, before experience, be incredible that there ſhould be the like diſregard in thoſe, who have had the moral ſyſtem of the world laid before them, as it is by Chriſtianity, and often inculcated upon them: becauſe this moral ſyſtem carries with it a good degree of evidence for its truth, upon its being barely propoſed to our thoughts. There is no need of abſtruſe reaſonings and diſtinctions, to convince an unprejudiced underſtanding, that there is a God who made and governs the world, and will judge it in righteouſneſs; though they may be neceſſary to anſwer abſtruſe difficulties, when once ſuch are raiſed: when the very meaning of thoſe words, which expreſs moſt intelligibly the general doctrine of religion, is pretended to be uncertain; and the clear truth of the thing itſelf is obſcured, by the intricacies of ſpeculation. But to an unprejudiced mind, ten thouſand thouſand in-

ſtances of Deſign, cannot but prove a Deſigner. And it is intuitively manifeſt, that creatures ought to live under a dutiful ſenſe of their Maker; and that Juſtice and Charity muſt be his laws, to creatures whom he has made ſocial, and placed in ſociety. Indeed the truth of Revealed Religion, peculiarly ſo called, is not ſelf-evident; but requires external proof, in order to its being received. Yet inattention, among Us, to Revealed Religion, will be found to imply the ſame diſſolute immoral temper of mind, as inattention to Natural Religion: becauſe, when both are laid before us, in the manner they are in Chriſtian countries of liberty; our obligations to inquire into both, and to embrace both upon ſuppoſition of their truth, are obligations of the ſame nature. For, Revelation claims to be the voice of God: and our obligation to attend to His voice, is, ſurely, moral in all caſes. And as it is inſiſted, that its evidence is concluſive, upon thorough conſideration of it; ſo, it offers itſelf to us with manifeſt obvious appearances of having ſomething more than human in it, and therefore in all reaſon requires, to have its claims moſt ſeriouſly examined into. It is to be added, that though light and knowledge, in what manner ſoever afforded us, is equally from God; yet a miraculous Revelation has a peculiar tendency, from the firſt principles of our nature, to awaken mankind, and inſpire them with reverence and awe: and this is a peculiar obligation, to attend to what claims to be ſo with ſuch appearances of truth. It is therefore moſt certain, that our obligations to enquire ſeriouſly into the

evidence of Chriſtianity, and, upon ſuppoſition of its truth, to embrace it; are of the utmoſt importance, and moral in the higheſt and moſt proper ſenſe. Let us then ſuppoſe, that the evidence of Religion in general, and of Chriſtianity, has been ſeriouſly inquired into, by all reaſonable men among us. Yet we find many profeſſedly to reject both, upon ſpeculative principles of infidelity. And all of them do not content themſelves with a bare neglect of religion, and enjoying their imaginary freedom from its reſtraints. Some go much beyond this. They deride God's moral government over the world. They renounce his protection, and defy his juſtice. They ridicule and vilify Chriſtianity, and blaſpheme the Author of it; and take all occaſions to manifeſt a ſcorn and contempt of Revelation. This amounts to an active ſetting themſelves againſt religion; to what may be conſidered as a poſitive principle of irreligion: which they cultivate within themſelves, and, whether they intend this effect or not, render habitual, as a good man does the contrary principle. And others, who are not chargeable with all this profligateneſs, yet, are in avowed oppoſition to religion, as if diſcovered to be groundleſs. Now admitting, which is the ſuppoſition we go upon, that theſe perſons act upon what they think principles of reaſon, and otherwiſe they are not to be argued with; it is really inconceivable, that they ſhould imagine they clearly ſee the whole evidence of it, conſidered in itſelf, to be nothing at all: nor do they pretend this. They are far indeed from having a juſt notion of its evidence: but they would not ſay its evidence was nothing,

if they thought the ſyſtem of it, with all its circumſtances, were credible, like other matters of ſcience or hiſtory. So that their manner of treating it muſt proceed, either from ſuch kind of objections againſt all religion, as have been anſwered or obviated in the former part of this treatiſe; or elſe from objections and difficulties, ſuppoſed more peculiar to Chriſtianity. Thus, they entertain prejudices againſt the whole notion of a Revelation, and miraculous interpoſitions. They find things in Scripture, whether in incidental paſſages, or in the general ſcheme of it, which appear to them unreaſonable. They take for granted, that if Chriſtianity were true, the light of it muſt have been more general, and the evidence of it more ſatisfactory, or rather over-bearing: that it muſt and would have been, in ſome way, otherwiſe put and left, than it is. Now this is not imagining they ſee the evidence itſelf to be nothing, or inconſiderable; but quite another thing. It is being fortified againſt the evidence, in ſome degree acknowledged, by thinking they ſee the ſyſtem of Chriſtianity, or ſomewhat which appears to them neceſſarily connected with it, to be incredible or falſe: fortified againſt that evidence, which might, otherwiſe, make great impreſſion upon them. Or, laſtly, if any of theſe perſons are, upon the whole, in doubt concerning the truth of Chriſtianity; their behaviour ſeems owing to their taking for granted, through ſtrange inattention, that ſuch doubting is, in a manner, the ſame thing, as being certain againſt it.

To theſe perſons, and to this ſtate of opinion concerning religion, the foregoing treatiſe is adapted. For, all the general objections againſt the moral ſyſtem of nature having been obviated, it is ſhewn, that there is not any peculiar Preſumption at all againſt Chriſtianity, either conſidered as not diſcoverable by Reaſon, or as unlike to what is ſo diſcovered; nor any worth mentioning, againſt it as miraculous, if any at all; none certainly, which can render it in the leaſt incredible. It is ſhewn, that upon Suppoſition of a divine Revelation, the Analogy of Nature renders it beforehand highly credible, I think probable, that many things in it muſt appear liable to great objections; and that we muſt be incompetent judges of it, to a great degree. This obſervation is, I think, unqueſtionably true, and of the very utmoſt importance: but it is urged, as I hope it will be underſtood, with great caution of not vilifying the faculty of reaſon, which is *the candle of the Lord within us* *; though it can afford no light where it does not ſhine; nor judge, where it has no principles to judge upon. The objections here ſpoken of, being firſt anſwered in the view of objections againſt Chriſtianity as a Matter of Fact, are in the next place conſidered as urged, more immediately, againſt the Wiſdom, Juſtice and Goodneſs of the Chriſtian diſpenſation. And it is fully made out, that they admit of exactly the like Anſwer, in every reſpect, to what the like Objections againſt the Conſtitution of Nature admit of: That as partial views give the appearance of wrong to

* prov. xx. 27

things, which, upon farther conſideration and knowledge of their relations to other things, are found juſt and good; ſo it is perfectly credible, that the things objected, againſt the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of the Chriſtian Diſpenſation, may be rendered inſtances of wiſdom and goodneſs, by their reference to other things beyond our view: Becauſe Chriſtianity is a Scheme as much above our comprehenſion, as That of Nature; and like that, a Scheme in which Means are made uſe of to accompliſh Ends, and which, as is moſt credible, may be carried on by general laws. And it ought to be attended to, that this is not an anſwer taken, merely or chiefly, from our Ignorance; but from ſomewhat poſitive, which our obſervation ſhews us. For, to like objections, the like anſwer is experienced to be juſt, in numberleſs parallel caſes. The objections againſt the Chriſtian diſpenſation, and the method by which it is carried on, having been thus obviated, in general and together; the chief of them are conſidered diſtinctly, and the particular things objected to are ſhewn credible, by their perfect Analogy, each apart, to the Conſtitution of Nature. Thus; If man be fallen from his primitive ſtate, and to be reſtored, and infinite Wiſdom and Power engages in accompliſhing our recovery: It were to have been expected it is ſaid, that this ſhould have been effected at once; and not by ſuch a long ſeries of means, and ſuch a various oeconomy of perſons and things; one diſpenſation preparatory to another, this to a farther one, and ſo on through an indefinite number of ages, before the end of the ſcheme propoſed

can be compleatly accompliſhed: a ſcheme conducted by infinite Wiſdom, and executed by almighty Power. But now on the contrary, our finding that every thing in the Conſtitution and Courſe of Nature is Thus carried on, ſhews ſuch expectations concerning Revelation to be highly unreaſonable; and is a ſatisfactory anſwer to them, when urged as objections againſt the Credibility, that the great ſcheme of Providence in the redemption of the world may be of this kind, and to be accompliſhed in this manner. As to the particular method of our redemption, the appointment of a Mediator between God and man: this has been ſhewn to be moſt obviouſly analogous to the general conduct of Nature, *i. e.* the God of nature, in appointing others to be the inſtruments of his mercy, as we experience in the daily courſe of providence. The condition of this world, which the doctrine of our redemption by Chriſt preſuppoſes, ſo much falls in with natural appearances, that heathen moraliſts inferred it from thoſe appearances: inferred, that human nature was fallen from its original rectitude, and, in conſequence of this, degraded from its primitive happineſs. Or, however this opinion came into the world, theſe appearances muſt have kept up the tradition, and confirmed the belief of it. And as it was the general opinion under the Light of Nature, that repentance and reformation, alone and by itſelf, was not ſufficient to do away ſin, and procure a full remiſſion of the penalties annext to it; and as the reaſon of the thing does not at all lead to any ſuch concluſion: So every day's experience ſhews us, that reformation is not, in any ort, ſufficient to pre-

vent the preſent diſadvantages and miſeries, which, in the natural courſe of things, God has annexed to folly and extravagance. Yet there may be ground to think, that the puniſhments, which, by the general laws of Divine government, are annext to vice, may be prevented: that proviſion may have been, even originally, made, that they ſhould be prevented by ſome means or other, though they could not by reformation alone. For we have daily inſtances of *ſuch mercy*, in the general conduct of Nature: Compaſſion provided for miſery *, medicines for diſeaſes, friends againſt enemies. There is proviſion made, in the original conſtitution of the world, that much of the natural bad conſequences of our follies, which perſons themſelves alone cannot prevent, may be prevented by the aſſiſtance of others; Aſſiſtance, which Nature enables, and diſpoſes, and appoints them to afford. By a method of goodneſs analogous to this, when the world lay in wickedneſs and conſequently ruin, *God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son* to ſave it: And *he being made perfect by ſuffering, became the author of eternal ſalvation to all them that obey him* †. Indeed neither Reaſon nor Analogy would lead us to think, in particular, that the interpoſition of Chriſt, in the manner in which he did interpoſe, would be of that efficacy for recovery of the world, which the Scripture teaches us it was: But neither would reaſon nor analogy lead us to think, that other particular means would be of the efficacy, which experience ſhews they are, in numberleſs inſtances. And therefore, as the caſe before

* Serm. at the ROLLS, p. 106. † John iii. 16. Heb. v. 9.

us does not admit of experience; ſo, that neither Reaſon nor Analogy can ſhew, how or in what particular way, the interpoſition of Chriſt, as revealed in Scripture, is of that efficacy, which it is there repreſented to be; this is no kind nor degree of preſumption againſt its being really of that efficacy. Farther: the objections againſt Chriſtianity, from the light of it not being univerſal, nor its evidence ſo ſtrong as might poſſibly be given us, have been anſwered by the general Analogy of Nature. That God has made ſuch variety of creatures, is indeed an anſwer to the former: but that he diſpenſes his gifts in ſuch variety, both of degrees and kinds, amongſt creatures, of the ſame ſpecies, and even to the ſame individuals at different times; is a more obvious and full anſwer to it. And it is ſo far from being the method of Providence in other caſes, to afford us ſuch overbearing evidence, as ſome require in proof of Chriſtianity; that on the contrary, the evidence upon which we are naturally appointed to act in common matters, throughout a very great part of life, is doubtful in a high degree. And admitting the fact, that God has afforded to ſome, no more than doubtful evidence of religion: the ſame account may be given of it, as of difficulties and temptations with regard to practice. But as it is not impoſſible *, ſurely, that this alledged doubtfulneſs may be men's own fault; it deſerves their moſt ſerious conſideration, whether it be not ſo. However, it is certain, that doubting implies a degree of evidence for That, of which we doubt: and that this degree of evidence, as really lays us under obligations, as demonſtrative evidence,

* p. 275. etc.

THE whole then of Religion is throughout credible: nor is there, I think, any thing relating to the revealed Diſpenſation of things, more different from the experienced Conſtitution and Courſe of Nature, than ſome parts of the Conſtitution of Nature are from other parts of it. And if ſo, the only queſtion which remains, is, what poſitive evidence can be alledged for the truth of Chriſtianity. This too in general has been conſidered, and the objections againſt it eſtimated. Deduct therefore what is to be deducted from that evidence, upon account of any weight which may be thought to remain in theſe objections, after what the Analogy of Nature has ſuggeſted in anſwer to them: and then conſider, what are the practical conſequences from all this, upon the moſt ſceptical principles, one can argue upon: (for I am writing to perſons who entertain theſe principles:) and upon ſuch conſideration, it will be obvious, that immorality, as little excuſe as it admits of in itſelf, is greatly aggravated, in perſons who have been made acquainted with Chriſtianity, whether they believe it, or not: becauſe the moral Syſtem of Nature, or Natural Religion, which Chriſtianity lays before us, approves itſelf, almoſt intuitively, to a reaſonable mind upon ſeeing it propoſed. In the next place, with regard to Chriſtianity, it will be obſerved; that there is a middle, between a full ſatisfaction of the truth of it, and a ſatisfaction of the contrary. The middle ſtate of mind between theſe two, conſiſts in a ſerious apprehenſion, that it may be true; joined with doubt, whether it be ſo. And this, upon the beſt judgment I am able to make, is as far towards

ſpeculative infidelity, as any Sceptick, can at all be ſuppoſed to go, who has had true Chriſtianity, with the proper evidence of it, laid before him, and has in any tolerable meaſure conſidered them. For I would not be miſtaken to comprehend all, who have ever heard of it: becauſe it ſeems evident that in many countries, called Chriſtian, neither Chriſtianity, nor its evidence are fairly laid before men. And in places where both are, there appear to be ſome, who have very little attended to either, and who reject Chriſtianity with a ſcorn proportionate to their inattention; and yet are by no means without underſtanding in other matters. Now it has been ſhewn, that a ſerious apprehenſion that Chriſtianity may be true, lays perſons under the ſtricteſt obligations of a ſerious regard to it, throughout the whole of their life: a regard not the ſame exactly, but in many reſpects nearly the ſame, with what a full conviction of its truth would lay them under. Laſtly, it will appear, that blaſphemy and prophaneneſs, I mean with regard to Chriſtianity, are abſolutely without excuſe. For there is no temptation to it, but from the wantonneſs of vanity or mirth: and theſe, conſidering the infinite importance of the ſubject, are no ſuch temptations as to afford any excuſe for it. If this be a juſt account of things, and yet men can go on to vilify or diſregard Chriſtianity, which is to talk and act, as if they had a demonſtration of its falſhood; there is no reaſon to think they would alter their behaviour to any purpoſe, though there were a demonſtration of its truth.

The End of the ſecond Part.

ADVERTISEMENT.

IN the first copy of these papers, I had inserted the two following dissertations into the chapters, of a future life, *and,* of the moral government of God, *with which they are closely connected. But as they do not directly fall under the* title *of the foregoing treatise, and would have kept the subject of it too long out of sight; it seemed more proper to place them by themselves.*

DISSERT. I.

Of perſonal Identity.

WHETHER we are to live in a future ſtate, as it is the moſt important queſtion which can poſſibly be aſked, ſo it is the moſt intelligible one which can be expreſſed in language. Yet ſtrange perplexities have been raiſed about the meaning of that Identity or Sameneſs of perſon, which is implied in the notion of our living Now and Hereafter, or in any two ſucceſſive moments. And the ſolution of theſe difficulties hath been ſtronger, than the difficulties themſelves. For, perſonal Identity has been explained ſo by ſome, as to render the enquiry concerning a future life, of no conſequence at all to us the perſons who are making it. And though few men can be miſled by ſuch ſubtilties; yet it may be proper a little to conſider them.

Now when it is aſked, wherein perſonal Identity conſiſts, the anſwer ſhould be the ſame, as if it were aſked, wherein conſiſts ſimilitude or equality; that all attempts to define, would but perplex it. Yet there is no difficulty at all in aſcertaining the idea. For as, upon two triangles being compared or viewed together, there ariſes to the mind the i-

dea of ſimilitude; or upon twice two and four, the idea of equality: ſo likewiſe, upon comparing the Conſciouſneſs of one's ſelf or one's own exiſtence in any two moments, there as immediately ariſes to the mind the idea of perſonal Identity. And as the two former compariſons not only give us the ideas of ſimilitude and equality; but alſo ſhew us, that two triangles are alike, and twice two and four are equal; ſo the latter compariſon not only gives us the idea of perſonal Identity, but alſo ſhews us the Identity of ourſelves in thoſe two moments; the preſent, ſuppoſe, and that immediately paſt; or the preſent, and that, a month, a year, or twenty years paſt. Or in other words, by reflecting upon that, which is my Self now, and that, which was my Self twenty years ago, I diſcern they are not two, but one and the ſame Self.

But though conſciouſneſs of what is paſt does thus aſcertain our perſonal Identity to ourſelves, yet to ſay, that it makes perſonal Identity, or is neceſſary to our being the ſame Perſons, is to ſay, that a perſon has not exiſted a ſingle moment, nor done one action, but what he can remember; indeed none but what he reflects upon. And one ſhould really think it Self-evident, that Conſciouſneſs of perſonal Identity preſuppoſes, and therefore cannot conſtitute, perſonal Identity; any more than knowledge, in any other caſe, can conſtitute truth, which it preſuppoſes.

This wonderful miſtake may poſſibly have ariſen from hence, that to be indued with Conſciouſneſs,

is inſeparable from the idea of a Perſon, or intelligent being. For, this might be expreſſed inaccurately thus, that Conſciouſneſs makes Perſonality: and from hence it might be concluded to make perſonal Identity. But though preſent conſciouſneſs of what we at preſent do and feel, is neceſſary to our being the perſons we now are; yet preſent conſciouſneſs of paſt actions or feelings, is not neceſſary to our being the ſame perſons who performed thoſe actions or had thoſe feelings.

The inquiry, what makes vegetables the Same in the common acceptation of the word, does not appear to have any relation to This of perſonal Identity: becauſe the word, *ſame*, when applied to Them and to Perſon, is not only applied to different ſubjects, but it is alſo uſed in different ſenſes. For when a man ſwears to the ſame tree, as having ſtood fifty years in the ſame place, he means only the ſame as to all the purpoſes of property and uſes of common life, and not that the tree has been all that time the ſame in the ſtrict philoſophical ſenſe of the word. For he does not know, whether any one particle of the preſent tree, be the ſame with any one particle of the tree which ſtood in the ſame place fifty years ago. And if they have not one common particle of matter, they cannot be the ſame tree in the proper philoſophic ſenſe of the word *ſame*: it being evidently a contradiction in terms, to ſay they are, when no part of their ſubſtance, and no one of their properties is the ſame: no part of their ſubſtance, by the ſuppoſition: no

one of their properties, becauſe it is allowed, that the ſame property cannot be transferred from one ſubſtance to another. And therefore, when we ſay the Identity or Sameneſs of a plant conſiſts in a continuation of the ſame life, communicated under the ſame organization, to a number of particles of matter, whether the ſame or not; the word *ſame*, when applied to life and to organization, cannot poſſibly be underſtood to ſignify, what it ſignifies in this very ſentence, when applied to matter. In a looſe and popular ſenſe then, the life and the organization and the plant are juſtly ſaid to be the ſame, notwithſtanding the perpetual change of the parts. But in a ſtrict and philoſophical manner of ſpeech, no Man, no Being, no Mode of Being, no Any-thing, can be the ſame with That, with which it hath indeed nothing the ſame. Now Sameneſs is uſed in this latter ſenſe when applied to Perſons. The Identity of theſe, therefore, cannot ſubſiſt with Diverſity of Subſtance.

THE thing here conſidered, and, demonſtratively, as I think, determined, is propoſed by Mr. *Locke* in theſe words, *Whether it*, i. e. the ſame Self or Perſon, *be the ſame identical Subſtance?* And he has ſuggeſted what is a much better anſwer to the queſtion, than that which he gives it in form. For he defines Perſon, *a thinking intelligent Being*, &c. and perſonal Identity, *the Sameneſs of a rational Being* *, the queſtion then is, whether the ſame rational Being is the ſame Subſtance: which

* Locke's works, Vol. I. p. 146.

needs no anſwer, becauſe Being and Subſtance, in this place, ſtand for the ſame idea. The ground of the doubt, whether the ſame Perſon be the ſame Subſtance, is ſaid to be this, that the conſciouſneſs of our own exiſtence, in youth and in old-age, or in any two joint ſucceſſive moments, is not *the ſame individual action* †, i. e. not the ſame conſciouſneſs, but different ſucceſſive conſciouſneſſes. Now it is ſtrange that this ſhould have occaſioned ſuch perplexities. For it is ſurely conceivable, that a perſon may have a capacity of knowing ſome object or other to be the ſame now, which it was when he contemplated it formerly: yet in this caſe, where, by the ſuppoſition, the object is perceived to be the ſame, the perception of it in any two moments cannot be one and the ſame perception. And thus, though the ſucceſſive conſciouſneſſes which we have of our own exiſtence are not the ſame, yet are they conſciouſneſſes of one and the ſame thing or object; of the ſame Perſon, Self, or living Agent. The Perſon, of whoſe exiſtence the conſciouſneſs is felt now, and was felt an hour or a year ago, is diſcerned to be, not two perſons, but one and the ſame perſon; and therefore is one and the ſame.

MR. *Locke*'s obſervations upon this ſubject appear haſty: and he ſeems to profeſs himſelf diſſatisfied with ſuppoſitions, which he has made relating to

† Locke, p. 146 143.

it*. But ſome of thoſe haſty obſervations have been carried to a ſtrange length by others, whoſe notion, when traced and examined to the bottom, amounts, I think, to this†: "That Perſonality is "not a permanent, but a tranſient thing: That it "lives and dies, begins and ends continually: "That no one can any more remain one and the "ſame Perſon two moments together, than two "ſucceſſive moments can be one and the ſame mo-"ment: That our ſubſtance is indeed continually "changing; but whether this be ſo or not, is, it "ſeems, nothing to the purpoſe; ſince it is not "Subſtance, but Conſciouſneſs alone, which con-"ſtitutes Perſonality; which Conſciouſneſs, being "ſucceſſive, cannot be the ſame in any two mo-"ments, nor conſequently the Perſonality conſti-"tuted by it." And from hence it muſt follow, that it is a fallacy upon Ourſelves, to charge our preſent Selves with any thing we did, or to imagine our preſent Selves intereſted in any thing which befell us, yeſterday; or that our preſent Self will be intereſted in what will befall us to-morrow: ſince our preſent Self is not, in reality, the ſame with the Self of yeſterday, but another like Self or Perſon coming in its room, and miſtaken for it; to which another Self will ſucceed to-morrow. This, I ſay, muſt follow: for if the Self or Perſon of to-day, and That of to-morrow, are not the ſame, but only like Perſons; the Perſon of to-day, is really no

* Locke, p. 152.

† See an anſwer to Dr Clarke's third defence of his letter to Mr. Dodwell, 2d Edit. p. 44, 56, &c.

more intereſted in what will befall the Perſon of to-morrow, than in what will befall any other perſon. It may be thought perhaps, that this is not a juſt repreſentation of the opinion we are ſpeaking of: becauſe thoſe who maintain it allow, that a Perſon is the ſame as far back as his remembrance reaches. And indeed they do uſe the *words*, *Identity* and *ſame* Perſon. Nor will language permit theſe words to be laid aſide: ſince if they were, there muſt be, I know-not-what ridiculous periphraſis, ſubſtituted in the room of them. But they cannot, conſiſtently with themſelves, mean, that the Perſon is really the ſame. For, it is ſelf-evident, that the Perſonality cannot be really the ſame, if, as they expreſsly aſſert, That in which it conſiſts, is not the ſame. And as, conſiſtently with themſelves, they cannot, ſo, I think it appears, they do not, mean, that the Perſon is *really* the ſame, but only that he is ſo in a fictitious ſenſe: in ſuch a ſenſe only as they aſſert, for this they do aſſert, that any number of Perſons whatever may be the ſame Perſon. The bare unfolding this notion, and laying it thus naked and open, ſeems the beſt confutation of it. However, ſince great ſtreſs is ſaid to be put upon it, I add the following things.

Firſt, This notion is abſolutely contradictory to that certain conviction, which neceſſarily and every moment riſes within us, when we turn our thoughts upon ourſelves, when we reflect upon what is paſt, and look forward upon what is to come. All imagination of a daily change of that living Agent

which each man calls Himſelf, for another, or of any ſuch change throughout our whole preſent life, is intirely borne down by our natural ſenſe of things. Nor is it poſſible for a perſon in his wits, to alter his conduct, with regard to his health or affairs, from a ſuſpicion, that though he ſhould live to-morrow, he ſhould not however, be the ſame perſon he is to-day. And yet, if it be reaſonable to act with reſpect to a future life, upon this notion that Perſonality is tranſient; it is reaſonable to act upon it, with reſpect to the preſent. Here then is a notion equally applicable to Religion and to our temporal Concerns: And every one ſees and feels the inexpreſſible abſurdity of it in the latter caſe. If therefore any can take up with it in the former, this cannot proceed from the reaſon of the thing, but muſt be owing to an inward unfairneſs, and ſecret corruption of heart.

Secondly, IT is not an Idea, or abſtract Notion, or Quality, but a Being only, which is capable of Life and Action, of Happineſs and Miſery. Now all Beings confeſſedly continue the ſame, during the whole time of their exiſtence. Conſider then a living Being now exiſting, and which has exiſted for any time alive: this living Being muſt have done and ſuffered and enjoyed, what it has done and ſuffered and enjoyed formerly, (this living Being, I ſay, and not another,) as really as it does and ſuffers and enjoys, what it does and ſuffers and enjoys this inſtant. All theſe ſucceſſive actions, enjoyments, and ſufferings, are actions, enjoyments, and ſufferings, of the ſame living Being. And they

are ſo, prior to all conſideration of its remembring or forgetting: ſince remembring or forgetting can make no alteration in the truth of paſt matter of fact. And ſuppoſe this Being endued with limited powers of knowledge and memory, there is no more difficulty in conceiving it to have a power, of knowing itſelf to be the ſame living Being which it was ſome time ago, of remembring ſome of its actions, ſufferings, and enjoyments, and forgetting others, than in conceiving it to know or remember or forget any thing elſe.

Thirdly, Every perſon is conſcious, that he is now the ſame Perſon or Self he was, as far back as his remembrance reaches: ſince when any one reflects upon a paſt action of his own, he is juſt as certain of the perſon who did that action, namely, Himſelf, the perſon who now reflects upon it, as he is certain that the action was at all done. Nay very often a perſon's aſſurance of an action having been done, of which he is abſolutely aſſured, ariſes wholly from the conſciouſneſs that he himſelf did it. And this He, Perſon, or Self, muſt either be a Subſtance, or the Property of ſome Subſtance. If He, if Perſon, be a Subſtance; then conſciouſneſs that He is the ſame Perſon, is conſciouſneſs that He is the ſame Subſtance. If the Perſon, or He, be the Property of a Subſtance; ſtill conſciouſneſs that He is the ſame Property is as certain a proof that his Subſtance remains the ſame, as Conſciouſneſs that he remains the ſame Subſtance would be: ſince the ſame property cannot be transferred from one ſubſtance to another.

But though we are thus certain, that we are the ſame Agents, living Beings, or Subſtances, Now, which we were as far back as our remembrance reaches; yet it is aſked, Whether we may not poſſibly be deceived in it? And this queſtion may be aſked at the end of any demonſtration whatever: becauſe it is a queſtion concerning the truth of perception by memory. And he who can doubt, whether perception by memory can in this caſe be depended upon, may doubt alſo, whether perception by deduction and reaſoning, which alſo include memory, or indeed whether intuitive perception can. Here then we can go no farther. For it is ridiculous to attempt to prove the truth of thoſe perceptions, whoſe truth we can no otherwiſe prove, than by other perceptions of exactly the ſame kind with them, and which there is juſt the ſame ground to ſuſpect; or to attempt to prove the truth of our faculties, which can no otherwiſe be proved, than by the uſe or means of thoſe very ſuſpected faculties themſelves.

DISSERT. II.

Of the Nature of Virtue.

THAT which renders Beings capable of moral government, is their having a moral nature, and moral faculties of perception and of action. Brute creatures are impreſſed and actuated by various inſtincts and propenſions: ſo alſo are We. But additional to this, We have a capacity of reflecting upon actions and characters, and making them an object to our thought: And on doing this, we naturally and unavoidably approve ſome actions, under the peculiar view of their being virtuous and of good deſert; and diſapprove others, as vicious and of ill-deſert. That we have this moral approving and diſapproving * faculty, is certain from our experiencing it in ourſelves, and recognizing it in each other. It appears from our exerciſing it

* This way of ſpeaking is taken from Epictetus †, and is made uſe of as ſeeming the moſt full, and leaſt liable to cavil. And the moral faculty may be underſtood to have theſe two epithets, δοκιμαστικη and αποδοκιμαστικη, upon a double account: becauſe, upon a ſurvey of actions, whether before or after they are done, it determines them to be good or evil; and alſo becauſe it determines itſelf to be the guide of action and of life, in contradiſtinction from all other faculties, or natural principles of action: in the very ſame manner, as ſpeculative reaſon *directly* and naturally judges of ſpeculative truth and falſhood; and, at the ſame time, is attended with a conſciouſneſs upon *reflection*, that the natural right to judge of them belongs to it.

† Arr. Epict. L. 1. c. 1.

unavoidably, in the approbation and diſapprobation even of feigned characters: From the words, right and wrong, odious and amiable, baſe and worthy, with many others of like ſignification in all languages, applied to actions and characters: From the many written ſyſtems of morals which ſuppoſe it; ſince it cannot be imagined, that all theſe authors, throughout all theſe treatiſes, had abſolutely no meaning at all to their words, or a meaning merely chimerical: From our natural ſenſe of gratitude, which implies a diſtinction between merely being the inſtrument of good, and intending it: From the like diſtinction, every one makes, between injury, and mere harm, which, HOBBS ſays, is peculiar to mankind; and between injury and juſt puniſhment, a diſtinction plainly natural, prior to the conſideration of human laws. It is manifeſt, great part of common language, and of common behaviour over the world, is formed upon ſuppoſition of ſuch a moral faculty; whether called Conſcience, moral Reaſon, moral Senſe, or divine Reaſon; whether conſidered as a ſentiment of the underſtanding, or as a perception of the heart, or, which ſeems the truth, as including both. Nor is it at all doubtful in the general, what courſe of action this faculty, or practical diſcerning power within us, approves, and what it diſapproves. For, as much as it has been diſputed wherein Virtue conſiſts, or whatever ground for doubt there may be about particulars; yet, in general, there is in reality an univerſally acknowledged ſtandard of it. It is That, which all ages and all countries have made profeſſion of in public; it is That, which every

man you meet, puts on the ſhew of: it is That, which the primary and fundamental laws of all civil conſtitutions, over the face of the earth, make it their buſineſs and endeavour to enforce the practice of upon mankind: namely, Juſtice, Veracity, and Regard to common good. It being manifeſt then, in general, that we have ſuch a faculty or diſcernment as this; it may be of uſe to remark ſome things, more diſtinctly, concerning it.

Firſt, It ought to be obſerved, that the object of this faculty is Actions *, comprehending under that name active or practical principles: thoſe principles from which men would act, if occaſions and circumſtances gave them power; and which, when fixed and habitual in any perſon, we call, his character. It does not appear, that brutes have the leaſt reflex ſenſe of actions, as diſtinguiſhed from events: or that will and deſign, which conſtitute the very nature of actions as ſuch, are at all an object to their perception. But to ours they are: and they are the object, and the only one, of the approving and diſapproving faculty. Acting, conduct, behaviour, abſtracted from all regard to what is, in fact and event, the conſequence of it, is itſelf the natural object of the moral diſcernment; as ſpeculative truth and falſehood is, of ſpeculative reaſon. Intention of ſuch and ſuch conſequences, indeed, is always

* ουδε η αρετη και κακια —— εν πειστει, αλλα ενεργειαι. M. Antoni. L. 9. 16. Virtutis laus omnis in actione conſiſtit. Cic. Off. l. 1. c. 6.

included; for it is part of the action itſelf: but though the intended good or bad conſequences do not follow, we have exactly the ſame ſenſe of the action as if they did. In like manner we think well or ill of characters, abſtracted from all conſideration of the good or the evil, which perſons of ſuch characters have it actually in their power to do. We never, in the moral way, applaud or blame either ourſelves or others, for what we enjoy or what we ſuffer, or for having impreſſions made upon us which we conſider as altogether out of our power: but only for what we do, or would have done had it been in our power; or for what we leave undone which we might have done, or would have left undone though we could have done it.

Secondly, OUR ſenſe or diſcernment of actions as morally good or evil, implies in it a ſenſe or diſcernment of them as of good or ill deſert. It may be difficult to explain this perception, ſo as to anſwer all the queſtions which may be aſked concerning it: but every one ſpeaks of ſuch and ſuch actions as deſerving puniſhment; and it is not, I ſuppoſe, pretended that they have abſolutely no meaning at all to the expreſſion. Now the meaning plainly is not, that we conceive it for the good of ſociety, that the doer of ſuch actions ſhould be made to ſuffer. For if unhappily it were reſolved, that a man who, by ſome innocent action, was infected with the plague, ſhould be left to periſh, leſt, by other peoples coming near him, the infection ſhould ſpread: no one would ſay, he deſerved this treatment. Innocence and ill-deſert are inconſiſtent ideas.

Ill-deſert always ſuppoſes guilt: and if one be not part of the other, yet they are evidently and naturally connected in our mind. The ſight of a man in miſery raiſes our compaſſion towards him; and, if this miſery be inflicted on him by another, our indignation againſt the author of it. But when we are informed, that the ſufferer is a villain, and is puniſhed only for his treachery or cruelty; our compaſſion exceedingly leſſens, and, in many inſtances, our indignation wholly ſubſides. Now what produces this effect, is the conception of that in the ſufferer, which we call ill-deſert. Upon conſidering then, or viewing together, our notion of vice and that of miſery, there reſults a third, That of ill-deſert. And thus there is in human creatures an aſſociation of the two ideas, natural and moral evil, wickedneſs and puniſhment. If this aſſociation were merely artificial or accidental, it were nothing: but being moſt unqueſtionably natural, it greatly concerns us to attend to it, inſtead of endeavouring to explain it away.

It may be obſerved farther, concerning our perception of good and of ill deſert, that the former is very weak with reſpect to common inſtances of virtue. One reaſon of which may be, that it does not appear to a ſpectator, how far ſuch inſtances of virtue proceed from a virtuous principle, or in what degree this principle is prevalent: ſince a very weak regard to virtue may be ſufficient to make men act well in many common inſtances. And on the other hand, our perception of ill-deſert in vicious actions

leſſens, in proportion to the temptations men are thought to have had to ſuch vices. For, Vice in human creatures conſiſting chiefly in the abſence or want of the virtuous principle; though a man be overcome, ſuppoſe, by tortures, it does not from thence appear, to what degree the virtuous principle was wanting. All that appears is, that he had it not in ſuch a degree, as to prevail over the temptation: but poſſibly he had it in a degree, which would have rendered him proof againſt common temptations.

Thirdly, Our perception of vice and ill deſert ariſes from, and is the reſult of, a compariſon of actions with the nature and capacities of the agent. For, the mere neglect of doing what we ought to do, would, in many caſes, be determined by all men to be in the higheſt degree vicious. And this determination muſt ariſe from ſuch compariſon, and be the reſult of it; becauſe ſuch neglect would not be vicious in creatures of other natures and capacities, as brutes. And it is the ſame alſo with reſpect to poſitive vices, or ſuch as conſiſt in doing what we ought not. For, every one has a different ſenſe of harm done by an idiot, madman or child, and by one of mature and common underſtanding; though the action of both, including the intention which is part of the action, be the ſame: as it may be, ſince idiots and madmen, as well as children, are capable not only of doing miſchief, but alſo of intending it. Now this difference muſt ariſe from ſomewhat diſcerned in the nature or capacities of one, which renders the action vicious; and the want of

which in the other, renders the ſame action innocent or leſs vicious: And this plainly ſuppoſes a compariſon, whether reflected upon or not, between the action and capacities of the agent, previous to our determining an action to be vicious. And hence ariſes a proper application of the epithets, incongruous, unſuitable, diſproportionate, unfit, to actions which our moral faculty determines to be vicious.

Fourthly, It deſerves to be conſidered, whether men are more at liberty, in point of morals, to make themſelves miſerable without reaſon, than to make other people ſo: or diſſolutely to neglect their own greater good, for the ſake of a preſent leſſer gratification, than they are to neglect the good of others, whom Nature has committed to their care. It ſhould ſeem, that a due concern about our own intereſt or happineſs, and a reaſonable endeavour to ſecure and promote it, which is, I think very much the meaning of the word, prudence, in our language; it ſhould ſeem, that this is virtue, and the contrary behaviour faulty and blameable: Since, in the calmeſt way of reflection, we approve of the firſt, and condemn the other conduct, both in ourſelves and others. This approbation and diſapprobation are altogether different from mere deſire of our own or of their happineſs, and from ſorrow upon miſſing it. For the object or occaſion of this laſt kind of perception, is ſatisfaction, or uneaſineſs: whereas the object of the firſt is active behaviour. In one caſe, what our thoughts fix upon, is our condition: in the other, our conduct. It is true indeed, that

Nature has not given us ſo ſenſible a diſapprobation of imprudence and folly, either in *ourſelves* or *others*, as of falſhood, injuſtice and cruelty: I ſuppoſe, becauſe that conſtant habitual ſenſe of private intereſt and good, which we always carry about with us, render ſuch ſenſible diſapprobation leſs neceſſary, leſs wanting, to keep us from imprudently neglecting our own happineſs, and fooliſhly injuring ourſelves, than it is neceſſary and wanting to keep us from injuring others, to whoſe good we cannot have ſo ſtrong and conſtant a regard: and alſo becauſe imprudence and folly, appearing to bring its own puniſhment more immediately and conſtantly than injurious behaviour, it leſs needs the additional puniſhment, which would be inflicted upon it by others, had they the ſame ſenſible indignation againſt it, as againſt injuſtice and fraud and cruelty. Beſides, happineſs being in itſelf the natural object of compaſſion; the unhappineſs which people bring upon themſelves, though it be wilfully, excites in us ſome pity for them: and this of courſe leſſens our diſpleaſure againſt them. But ſtill it is matter of experience, that we are formed ſo, as to reflect very ſeverely upon the greater inſtances of imprudent neglects and fooliſh raſhneſs, both in ourſelves and others. In inſtances of this kind, men often ſay of themſelves with remorſe, and of others with ſome indignation, that they deſerved to ſuffer ſuch calamities, becauſe they brought them upon themſelves, and would not take warning. Particularly when perſons come to poverty and diſtreſs by a long courſe of extravagance, and after frequent admonitions, though without falſhood or injuſtice; we plainly

do not regard ſuch people as alike objects of compaſſion with thoſe, who are brought into the ſame condition by unavoidable accidents. From theſe things it appears, that prudence is a ſpecies of virtue, and folly of vice: meaning by *Folly*, ſomewhat quite different from mere incapacity; a thoughtleſs want of that regard and attention to our own happineſs, which we had capacity for. And this the word properly includes; and, as it ſeems, in its uſual acceptation; for we ſcarce apply it to brute creatures.

However, if any perſon be diſpoſed to diſpute the matter, I ſhall very willingly give him up the words Virtue and Vice, as not applicable to prudence and folly; but muſt beg leave to inſiſt, that the faculty within us, which is the judge of actions, approves of prudent actions, and diſapproves imprudent ones: I ſay prudent and imprudent *Actions* as ſuch, and conſidered diſtinctly from the happineſs or miſery which they occaſion. And by the way, this obſervation may help to determine, what juſtneſs there is in that objection againſt religion, that it teaches us to be intereſted and ſelfiſh.

Fifthly, Without inquiring how far, and in what ſenſe, Virtue is reſolvable into Benevolence, and Vice into the Want of it; it may be proper to obſerve, that Benevolence and the Want of it, ſingly conſidered, are in no ſort the Whole of Virtue and Vice. For if this were the caſe, in the review of ones own character or that of others, our moral underſtanding and moral ſenſe would be in-

different to every thing, but the degrees in which benevolence prevailed, and the degrees in which it was wanting. That is, we ſhould neither approve of Benevolence to ſome perſons rather than to others, nor diſapprove injuſtice and falſhood upon any other account, than merely as an overbalance of happineſs was foreſeen likely to be produced by the firſt, and of miſery by the ſecond. But now on the contrary, ſuppoſe two men competitors for any thing whatever, which would be of equal advantage to each of them: Though nothing indeed would be more impertinent, than for a ſtranger to buſy himſelf to get one of them preferred to the other; yet ſuch endeavour would be Virtue, in behalf of a friend or benefactor, abſtracted from all conſideration of diſtant conſequences: as that examples of gratitude, and the cultivation of friendſhip, would be of general good to the world. Again, ſuppoſe one man ſhould, by fraud or violence, take from another the fruit of his labour, with intent to give it to a third, who, he thought, would have as much pleaſure from it, as would balance the pleaſure which the firſt poſſeſſor would have had in the enjoyment, and his vexation in the loſs of it; ſuppoſe alſo that no bad conſequences would follow: yet ſuch an action would ſurely be vicious. Nay farther, were treachery, violence and injuſtice, no otherwiſe vicious, than as foreſeen likely to produce an overbalance of miſery to ſociety; then, if in any caſe a man could procure to himſelf as great advantage by an act of injuſtice, as the whole foreſeen inconvenience, likely to be brought upon others by it, would amount to; ſuch a piece of in-

juſtice would not be faulty or vicious at all: Becauſe it would be no more than, in any other caſe, for a man to prefer his own ſatisfaction to another's in equal degrees. The fact then appears to be, that we are conſtituted ſo as to condemn falſhood, unprovoked violence, injuſtice, and to approve of benevolence to ſome preferably to others, abſtracted from all conſideration, which conduct is likelieſt to produce an overbalance of happineſs or miſery. And therefore, were the Author of Nature to propoſe nothing to himſelf as an end but the production of happineſs, were His moral character merely That of benevolence; yet ours is not ſo. Upon that ſuppoſition indeed, the only reaſon of his giving us the above-mentioned approbation of benevolence to ſome perſons rather than others, and diſapprobation of falſhood, unprovoked violence, and injuſtice, muſt be, that He foreſaw, this conſtitution of our nature would produce more happineſs, than forming us with a temper of mere general benevolence. But ſtill, ſince this is our conſtitution; falſhood, violence, injuſtice, muſt be Vice in us, and benevolence to ſome preferably to others, Virtue; abſtracted from all conſideration of the overbalance of evil or good, which they may appear likely to produce.

Now if human creatures are endued with ſuch a moral nature as we have been explaining, or with a moral faculty, the natural object of which is actions: moral government muſt conſiſt, in rendring them happy and unhappy, in rewarding and puniſhing them, as they follow, neglect, or depart from,

the moral rule of action interwoven in their nature, or ſuggeſted and enforced by this moral faculty*; in rewarding and puniſhing them upon account of their ſo doing.

I am not ſenſible, that I have, in this fifth obſervation, contradicted what any author deſigned to aſſert. But ſome of great and diſtinguiſhed merit, have, I think, expreſſed themſelves in a manner, which may occaſion ſome danger to careleſs readers, of imagining the whole of Virtue to conſiſt in ſingly aiming, according to the beſt of their judgment, at promoting the happineſs of mankind in the preſent ſtate; and the whole of Vice, in doing what they foreſee, or might foreſee, is likely to produce an overbalance of unhappineſs in it: than which miſtakes, none can be conceived more terrible. For it is certain, that ſome of the moſt ſhocking inſtances of injuſtice, adultery, murder, perjury, and even of perſecution, may, in many ſuppoſeable caſes, not have the appearance of being likely to produce an overbalance of miſery in the preſent ſtate: perhaps ſometimes may have the contrary appearance. For this reflection might eaſily be carried on, but I forbear———The happineſs of the world is the concern of Him, who is the Lord and the Proprietor of it: Nor do we know what we are about, when we endeavour to promote the good of mankind in any ways, but thoſe which He has directed; that is indeed in all ways, not con-

* pag. 143.

trary to Veracity and Juſtice. I ſpeak thus upon ſuppoſition of perſons really endeavouring, in ſome ſort, to do good without regard to theſe. But the truth ſeems to be, that ſuch ſuppoſed endeavours proceed, almoſt always, from ambition, the ſpirit of party, or ſome indirect principle, concealed perhaps in great meaſure from perſons themſelves. And though it is our buſineſs and our duty to endeavour, within the bounds of Veracity and Juſtice, to contribute to the eaſe, convenience, and even chearfulneſs and diverſion of our fellow-creatures: yet from our ſhort views, it is greatly uncertain, whether this endeavour will, in particular inſtances, produce an overbalance of happineſs upon the whole; ſince ſo many and diſtant things muſt come into the account. And that which makes it our duty, is, that there is ſome appearance that it will, and no poſitive appearance ſufficient to balance this, on the contrary ſide; and alſo, that ſuch benevolent endeavour is a cultivation of that moſt excellent of all virtuous principles, the active principle of benevolence.

HOWEVER, though Veracity, as well as Juſtice, is to be our rule of life; it muſt be added, otherwiſe a ſnare will be laid in the way of ſome plain men, that the uſe of common forms of ſpeech generally underſtood, cannot be falſhood; and, in general, that there can be no deſigned falſhood without deſigning to deceive. It muſt likewiſe be obſerved, that in numberleſs caſes, a man may be under the ſtricteſt obligations to what he foreſees will deceive, without his intending it. For it is

impoſſible not to foreſee, that the words and actions of men in different ranks and employments, and of different educations, will perpetually be miſtaken by each other: And it cannot but be ſo, whilſt they will judge with the utmoſt careleſſneſs, as they daily do, of what they are not, perhaps, enough informed to be competent judges of, even though they conſidered it with great attention.

FINIS.

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